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October 13, 1885.

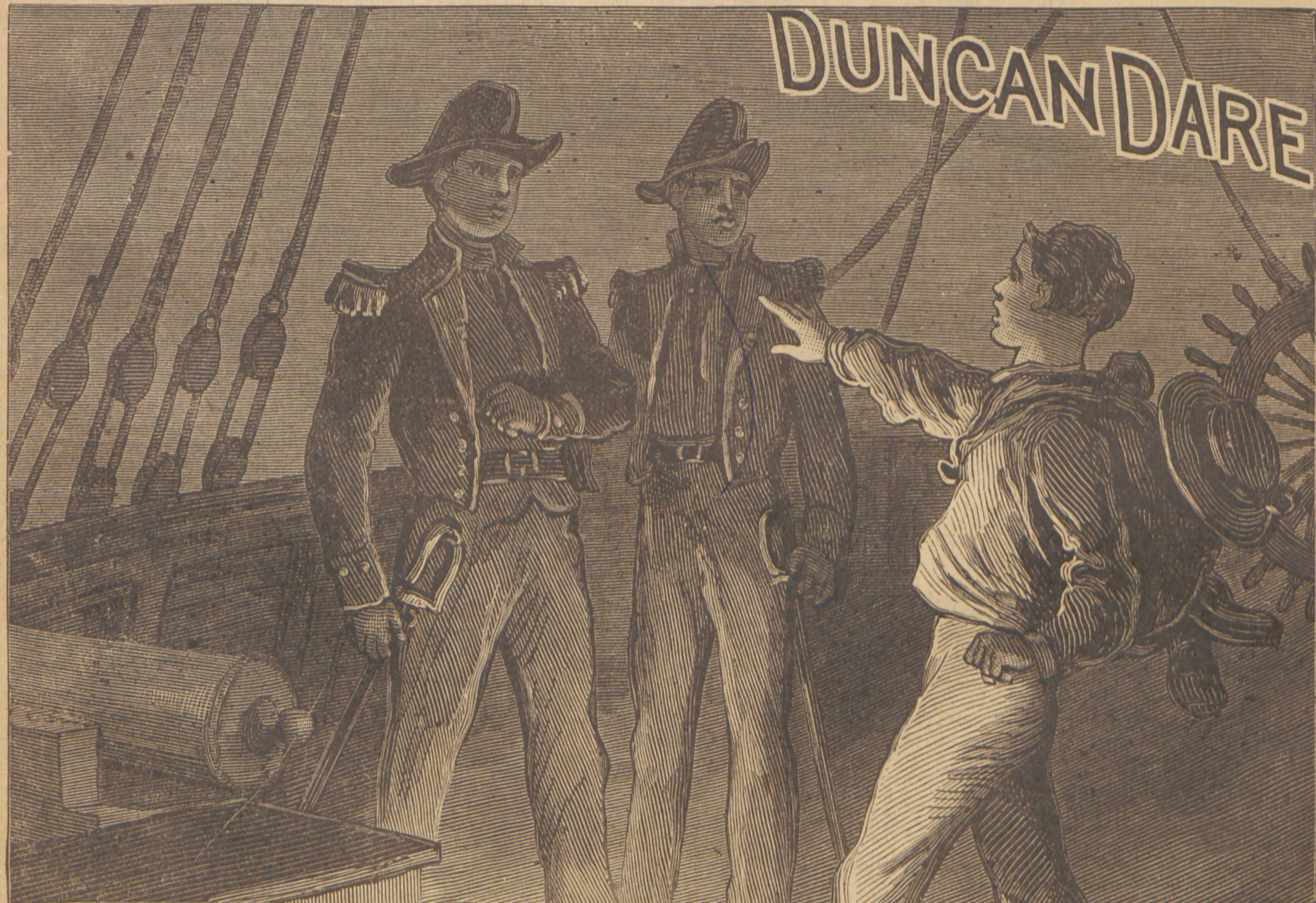
Vol. XVII.

\$2.50
a Year.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS,
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 Cents.

No. 429.



OR,

A Young Sailor's Fight for Fortune.

A Romance of Sea and Shore.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "MERLE MONTE'S CRUISE," "THE
SEA MARAUDER," "SEAWAIF THE BOY
LIEUTENANT," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE SCHOOLMASTER'S LOVE.

In the outskirts of a small village, upon the lower end of Long Island, there still stands a small building, with shingle walls, stained and worn by time, which a hundred years ago was a school-house of considerable importance in those early days.

It was a story and a half high, with dormer windows, and is situated in the midst of a grove

THE
BOY REFUGEE

"YOU MAY FLOG ME TO DEATH, PIRATE CAPTAIN, BUT I'LL NEVER PILOT YOU INTO THE INLET," WAS THE BOLD RESPONSE OF DUNCAN DARE.

of elms, while about it is a village graveyard where crumbling under the touch of the finger of time, are a number of old moss-grown tombstones, some bearing date back two centuries.

Not far from the old school-house, the ocean beats continually upon the sandy beach, and its roar can be distinctly heard in winter, when the doors of the school-house are closed, and the crackling of the blazing logs upon the hearth, mingle with the sounding sea.

There, four-score years ago, Dominie Silas Finn was the presiding genius over the little institution of learning, and the scholars, boys and girls alike, feared him as they did the spooks that were said to haunt the little graveyard by night.

They had an awe of him too, because he dared to live alone in the upper half story of the school-house, which was nearly half a mile away from any other habitation, and he seemed not to dread the graves that surrounded him.

In the two rooms that comprised the up-stairs of the school-house, Silas Finn lived alone, doing his own cooking and household work, and upon cold winter mornings he was wont to be in his chair, smiling grimly at the scholars who were late.

From whence Silas Finn had come no one knew, other than that one night of storm a wreck had come ashore and he was the sole survivor.

He had been cast up by the sea, and the friendly dwellers had kindly cared for him.

He said that he was an Englishman, and was coming to America to settle; but his all had been lost with the ship, and he was content to settle down there and make an honest living if he could.

There was that about him that showed he was a man of education, and, as a schoolmaster was just then wanted, he was installed as Dominie in the Elm Grove school.

For long years he had held the position, seeing his scholars grow up and many about him pass away, and other children come to take their place.

In the village there was a young widow with an only child, a boy.

The father of the youth had been a successful sea-captain, and had laid up a snug little sum, along with his little farm and comfortable home near the village.

But one day he sailed for other seas, and no word was ever heard of him or his ship afterward.

His widow, for he was believed dead, was young, scarcely thirty, very pretty and greatly admired by the country beaux, who had as a rival schoolmaster Silas Finn.

As far as he could Silas Finn made love to pretty widow Dare, and her son, Duncan, was always received with a smile, came he early or late.

Now Duncan, in his fourteenth year was a handsome lad, with broad shoulders, wiry form, and a face full of intelligence and resolution.

He idolized his mother, and yet, not wishing her to marry Silas Finn, made that worthy's life at times very uncomfortable.

Than Duncan Finn, it was said by old seafarers that no better sailor for his years lived, and he was generally popular, though a little too fond of mischief, some thought, and old gossips predicted that he would come to no good end.

He could ride a horse like an Indian, row a boat all day without tiring, throw a harpoon, swim like a fish, and as a rifle-shot many old hunters had to yield to him.

With his books he was further advanced than any other scholar in school, though some were several years his senior.

One pleasant afternoon Duncan remained after school.

His face was pale, and he evidently had something upon his mind.

The other scholars departed, and when he was alone with Dominie Finn, he walked up to him boldly and stood awaiting to be asked his errand.

Now Silas Finn was by no means a handsome man.

He had a clean-shaven face, with twinkling eyes set far back in his head, his hair was worn long, and his mouth was cruel in expression.

He had been known to smile while he whipped his scholars until the blood came after each blow.

His form was raw-boned and tall, yet he was possessed of great power, and his fifty years had not taken from him any of his vigor.

"Well, Duncan, what can I do for you?" he asked, in a kindly voice, which he always used to the boy, since he had been devoting himself to Mrs. Dare.

"Schoolmaster, my mother says that you asked her to marry you?" said Duncan, choking

slightly, and his face paling and flushing by turns.

"Yes, Duncan, I did ask your mother to become my wife, for I love her.

"She is a comely lady, and not yet thirty-three, so our ages are not against it, as I am but fifty, and your father has now been dead over twelve years."

"I do not believe my father to be dead, sir," was the cool reply.

"Well, lad, you are the only one who entertains that belief, and your mother told me your silly idea that your father would some day come back."

"I believe it, sir."

"Nonsense, he has been at the bottom of the sea for twelve long years, and I have asked your mother to marry me."

"And her answer, sir?"

"That she respected me, and believed that I would make her a good husband, and be as a father to you."

"I invested the gold I had with me, when I came here nearly twenty years ago, and it has turned out well, so that I am not poor in this world's goods, and all considered, I believe that the match will prove a happy one, Duncan."

"I can never consent to it, sir," came in quick, firm, words.

The schoolmaster's eyes glittered fiercely, but he said, blandly:

"Duncan, your mother was foolish enough to say that she would not care to marry without your consent; but I hope you are not going to try and cause ill-will between you and I."

"Schoolmaster, I have never liked you, although you have been kind to me."

"Ever since the day I interfered when you were whipping pretty little Jessie Hampton, I have not felt the same toward you, in spite of your kind treatment to me, for I knew Jessie was not to blame for the joke played upon you by the other girls."

"She urged against it, and yet would not tell on them, and she suffered for it."

"You have been good with me on my mother's account; but I know how you regard me, and I never wish to see you my step-father, but more on account of my mother than myself, while also, as I told you, I do not believe my father is dead."

Silas Finn sat like one struck dumb, as the boy had his say, and it seemed an effort for him to contain himself, after Duncan had finished speaking.

A moment he sat in silence, his eyes blazing fire, and then he said, in a voice hoarse with passion:

"Boy, you may hate me all you wish; but I shall be your step-father, my word that I will, and then woe unto you! Duncan Dare."

"You never will marry my mother, sir, if I can help it." was the reply, and Duncan Dare turned to leave the school-room, when he saw a form standing just outside the door.

He knew him as Barney Bolls, an old bachelor miser, who was the dominie's most intimate friend, and who had been his rival also for the hand of pretty widow Dare.

But receiving his dismissal from the widow, Barney Bolls had still kept up his friendship for Dominie Silas, though he had never spoken again to the woman he had wished to make his wife.

"What, threatening your schoolmaster, you young scapegrace?" cried Barney Bolls as he stepped into the school-room.

"Yes, and I'd threaten you, you old fossil, if you had dared say you would marry my mother in spite of me," and Duncan Dare walked toward the door.

The two men glanced at each other, and Barney Bolls called out:

"Dominie, shall I catch and hold him, while you thrash him?"

"No, let him go to-day; but his time will come," answered Silas Finn with a wicked look.

"And your time will come, Dominie Finn," was the answer that Duncan Dare threw back at the teacher as he went out of the door, his whole frame quivering with emotion.

CHAPTER II.

DUNCAN DARE'S OATH.

The house of the widow Dare was situated about a mile from the school-house, and was as cosey an abode as could be found anywhere.

It was surrounded by half a hundred acres, the fields were tilled, the pastures were dotted with cattle and sheep, and the house was snugly built and comfortable.

The widow was a very handsome woman, loving her only child, Duncan, with an affection

that knew no bounds, and seemingly she had held not a thought in the world, that was not for her brave handsome boy.

Her husband, Captain Dare had, like the dominie, come ashore on Long Island in a storm.

His vessel had been wrecked, and he had nearly lost his life, but was saved from death by the courage of the young girl who afterward became his wife.

Her father was the captain of a whaler, and the wife and daughter had several times given up the little farm-house to cruise with him.

On one voyage, the mother had been lost at sea, swept overboard in a gale, and the husband and father would not take his daughter with him again.

Living at the farm alone, with only the faithful farm-hands, Mary Dent, for such was her maiden name, had her sail-boat, which she sailed to perfection, and her surf-skiff, in which she was often wont to go out through the breakers.

Thus it was, that one night of storm, she went to the beach, when the deep boom of a gun told her a vessel was in distress.

There had a large crowd gathered there from the village, and all eyes were turned upon the flashes off upon the sea, where a cannon was appealing loudly for help from the shore.

It came from a vessel seen upon the outer bar, and that the sea was beating the wreck to pieces, there could be no doubt.

In vain did Mary Dent appeal to the fishermen to go to the succor of those on the vessel, for they would not stir, one and all saying it was impossible for a boat to live in that wild sea.

Turning away, Mary Dent went to the inlet, not far distant, and soon a cry arose, as her light surf-skiff was seen bounding out through the white breakers.

She held on her way, firmly, surely, riding on the tops of the crested waves, yet steadily keeping her course.

In vain did the crowd on the beach implore her to come back, for she heeded not their cries.

At length she disappeared, and all believed her lost; but no, she was too far off from the shore to be seen in those mad waters, and she safely reached the wreck that was foundering to pieces.

It appeared to be a vessel-of-war, and her commander, a young and handsome Englishman, was badly hurt by being thrown against the bulwarks by a wave.

The crew, had many of them been washed overboard, and seemed strangely depleted in numbers for a war-vessel; but they were loyal to their commander, and against his urging, placed him in the surf-skiff along with four of their number, two of whom were to return in the light surf-boat for others, for their own boats had been stove to pieces or lost.

In safety the brave girl reached the beach, and willing hands rushed forward to aid the shipwrecked men, while, shamed by the pluck of Mary Dent, the crew of the large life-boat started to the rescue, and the remainder of those on the wreck were taken off.

But the breakers hurled the life-boat bottom-up, and with safety at hand several more of the unfortunate crew from the wreck were lost.

The young captain, by Mary Dent's direction, was carried to her home, not far distant, while his crew were cared for elsewhere.

Several days after, the wrecked mariners went over to the Dent farm and held an interview with their captain, after which they went to the nearest port and departed, going no one knew whither.

It was said that the wrecked vessel was an English ship-of-war, and so she proved as such, for the wreckage showed that she had been a cruiser; but the men had had little to say of themselves, and the curious gossips had to depend upon the young captain for further information.

As he got better he gave his name as David Dare, his nationality English, his rank captain, his vessel a cruiser.

As soon as he was able to be about he departed for New York, and the gossips expected to see him no more.

But some months after he returned as commander of a good vessel, a whaler, and Mary Dent became his wife.

Such is the history of Duncan Dare's parents, and, strangely like his father, the youth would not believe that his father was dead, and hoped against hope that some day he would return.

A portrait in the farm-house parlor showed David Dare in all the strength of manhood and manly beauty, and as Duncan gazed at it he

wondered how his mother could ever think an instant of wedding old Dominie Finn.

"No, no; she shall not marry him—I swear it!" he said earnestly, as he stood in the parlor gazing at the portrait, half an hour after his leaving the school-house, where he had had the interview with the dominie.

He was now waiting in the parlor for the coming of his mother, for he had sent a servant to say he wished to see her there.

CHAPTER III.

MOTHER AND SON.

DUNCAN DARE stood gazing fixedly at his father's portrait, as his mother entered the room.

It was the portrait of a man of thirty, perhaps, and in an undress naval uniform.

A dark face, full of character, a trifle stern, but very handsome, and strangely like the young face, just half its years, that looked up into it.

Duncan was dressed in sea costume, for he always wore it, to school and elsewhere, except on Sundays, when he attended the village church with his mother, and then he laid aside his sailor togs for a Sabbath-day suit of black.

Mrs. Dare was certainly a handsome woman, and also the resemblance between mother and son was striking, and as strongly marked as was that between Duncan and his father.

The husband and wife were not at all alike, the man being a brunette, the woman a blonde; and yet the son bore a strong resemblance to each.

"Well, Duncan, I thought you had company, as you sent Liza to tell me to join you in the parlor," said Mrs. Dare, speaking in a full, rich voice, and glancing around the room to see if any one else was there besides her son and herself.

"No, mother, I have no company; but I asked you to come here that we might have a little talk, and in the presence of my father."

"Your father! Great God, boy, has he returned?" and Mrs. Dare turned deadly pale.

"No, mother, not in flesh, though I hope he will some day come back to us, and I believe it.

"Don't be frightened, mother, for I meant in the presence of yonder portrait, which you told me was a speaking likeness of my father."

"Yes, Duncan, it is the image of what your father was soon after we were married; but what a start you gave me!"

"I am sorry, mother, but I also had a shock to-day."

"You?"

"Yes, mother."

"Tell me of it, son."

"It was the schoolmaster, Silas Finn, who gave it to me."

"What, did he dare strike you?"

"He did me no bodily harm, mother, but he hurt my heart, for he dared to say to me that you had promised to marry him."

Mrs. Dare choked up several times ere she could reply, and then said:

"Yes, my son, I said, if you did not oppose it, I would become his wife."

"Mother, look upon yonder portrait, and then picture in your mind Silas Finn, and see how you can give up the memory of that man for the reality of the schoolmaster."

"Ah, Duncan, I know that they are not alike, and yet—"

"Mother, you risked your life to save my father, and you loved him with your whole soul."

"Would you risk your life to save Silas Finn, and could you even like him?"

"Duncan, I will not be questioned too closely by even you."

"Mr. Finn has asked me to marry him, and I have consented, if you raised no objections."

"But I do object, mother."

"For what reasons?" coldly asked the mother.

"You are not sure that my father is dead."

"Ah yes, of that there can be no possible doubt."

"I believe that he yet lives."

"And I am sure that he is dead; but what else have you against Mr. Finn?"

"He is an old cranky fellow, cruel as a Turk, and no one knows who he was, or where he came from before they cast him ashore here."

"That was many years ago, Duncan, and no one knew aught of your father, I must admit."

Duncan winced a little at this, and then replied:

"Mother, you were happy with my father, but that old wretch will break your heart."

"He is severe with his scholars, yes; but he is considered a good man, and, my son, I shall marry him."

"Mother!"

"I am sorry, Duncan, that you hold such a prejudice; but you will soon get over it."

"Never! you must not, you *shall* not marry Silas Finn," and the boy sprung to his feet quivering with emotion.

"Duncan Dare, I am your mother, you must remember, and I am old enough to know what I am about, and I tell you that I shall marry Silas Finn, and I ask you not to create a scene about it and make me more wretched than I am," and Duncan Dare saw that there was some secret cause for his mother's action.

What it was he could not guess; but it made him the more determined that she should not marry the schoolmaster, and he said:

"Well, mother, I am sorry to give you pain, but I do not believe you wish to marry that man, or that you care for him even, and I am sworn to prevent it; but now kiss me, mother, and do not let us speak of the subject again until it has to come up between us."

Mary Dare threw her arms about her son's neck and burst into tears, while from her shut teeth came the moan:

"My God! my God! have mercy upon me!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE SCHOOLMASTER'S REVENGE.

THE next day, bright and early, as was his wont, Duncan Dare was at school.

He was always punctual, never missed a day, if possible, and stood at the head of all his classes, for he was studious as well as an athlete, and fond of all sports.

Dominie Finn received him with a grim smile, and there was a wicked look in his eyes as he said:

"Good-morning, Master Dare."

"I hope you are in better humor, to-day?"

"I am in the same humor I was yesterday, Dominie Finn," was the quiet response of the boy as he went to his desk.

That day it seemed that all Duncan Dare did was wrong.

The scholars even said that he knew his lessons perfectly, and yet he was told to stay after school and recite them over.

He was found fault with, continually, when doing nothing, and at last driven to retaliation upon the schoolmaster, when he knew that he was doing everything to worry him, he began to play pranks in earnest.

One boy's pants were securely fastened to the bench with wooden pegs, and when called upon to come and recite his lesson, the youth could not rise, and, rushing to the spot, Dominie Finn discovered the cause.

Instantly he dealt Duncan Dare a terrible blow that felled him like an ox for an instant.

"For shame, Dominie Finn, for shame!" cried a sweet, girlish voice, and the dominie turned fiercely upon the speaker.

It was pretty Jessie Hampton, a sunny-haired, blue-eyed little maid of twelve.

Her blue eyes flashed as she fearlessly met the gaze of the infuriated schoolmaster, while he roared:

"Do you speak to me thus, Jessie Hampton?"

"I think it a shame, sir, for you to knock a boy down, for you are a man, and you have picked at poor Duncan all day, when he has done nothing before to deserve it."

The schoolmaster stood like one dazed, for such language he never had to listen to.

He knew that Duncan liked the little girl immensely, and he hated her, for she never had seemed impressed with his great dignity.

In those days whipping in the schools was as common as was flogging in the navy, and girls and boys alike were the victims.

Instantly the dominie determined to punish Duncan Dare still more by chastising Jessie Hampton, and he whirled his birchen switch in air to bring it down upon her graceful, tender shoulders.

She never flinched, but looked him straight in the eye, and in another instant the blow would have fallen with stinging severity, when the stick was seized by Duncan Dare from behind, and torn from the grasp of the teacher with a force that tore the flesh from his hands, then snapped in pieces and cast upon the floor.

"You may punish me, Dominie Finn, and I'll not resist you, but you shall not strike Jessie Hampton," hissed the boy, now aroused to fever pitch of anger.

Dominie Finn was white with passion.

He turned his gaze upon the youth, who stood defiantly before him, then upon Jessie Hampton, who calmly met his eyes, and next upon the two score of children present.

There was a silence like death in the room.

The children stared in open-mouthed wonder

at the dreaded Dominie, the defiant boy and the fearless girl, while Silas Finn seemed to be collecting his energies for a spring upon Duncan Dare to annihilate him.

"Dominie, you can thrash me all you wish, and I'll raise no hand to resist you, but you shall not strike Jessie Hampton," came in earnest tones from the boy's lips.

There was that in the look of the bold youth that cowed the man, for he seemed to lack the courage to attack him, as he had intended; but instead he hissed forth:

"Duncan Dare, I will settle with you after school."

"As for you, miss, I'll not forget your conduct," and the Dominie turned from the boy to the girl.

Neither of the two uttered a word, and wheeling suddenly Silas Finn went back to his throne, as the scholars called his seat, and sat down, while a murmur arose in the school-room that indicated very plainly that those who had so long trembled under the glaring eyes of the master now felt that he had met his match in both Duncan Dare and Jessie Hampton.

With the same wicked smile on his face, which he wore when meditating punishment, Silas Finn wrote a hasty note and dispatched one of the scholars with it, telling him to hurry back.

The boy read the note, and to put Duncan Dare upon his guard, said aloud, upon re-entering the school-house door:

"Master, I gave the letter to Mister Barney Bolls and he says he will come, sir."

Silas Finn scowled, but made no reply, and half an hour later school was dismissed.

Slowly the scholars filed out of their seats, all casting glances of commiseration at Duncan Dare, who nodded pleasantly and still remained at his desk.

Jessie Hampton was the last to leave, and tears stood in her eyes as she held out her hand with:

"Oh, Duncan, I am so sorry."

"I don't mind the licking he'll give me, Jessie; but I hate to be kept in, for I brought my rifle and meant to go home by way of the forest and kill some squirrels."

"Now don't cry, for a flogging isn't so bad after all."

"You have never been flogged, Duncan, and it will be a great deal for you to stand."

"Don't mind it, Jessie, for I won't."

"I'll beg the master to forgive you."

"Not for anything would I have you do so, Jessie, for he would only get savage toward you."

"Now go, for he is glancing at us, and I'll see you at school, to-morrow."

Jessie sighed and walked away, turning aside to let Barney Bolls pass, for he just then entered the school-room.

For awhile the voices of the scholars, hesitating without, were heard, and then the sounds died away in the distance, and only the murmur of the two men talking earnestly together broke the stillness.

Duncan Dare sat in his seat, quietly eying the two men.

He was pale, but firm, and had laid his books aside to face the ordeal, whatever it might be.

"Well, Mr. Bolls, I have told you the circumstances, as they occurred, and, as one of the trustees of the school, I ask your advice regarding this unruly and rebellious youth?" said Dominie Finn in a loud tone, after he and Barney Bolls had come to an understanding as to what should be done.

"Flog him, master, flog him as he deserves, and I will help you."

"I will do so, and, did you say that you had a good switch?"

"Yes, here are several I picked up while on the way here, for I had an idea you might need them," and the old miser held up half-a-dozen sticks, any one of which would have felled a man by a blow on the head.

"I'll tie him first, for he's a strong young rascal," said Silas, and he produced a rope from his desk, and the two came toward the youth.

Instantly Duncan Dare was upon his feet and standing like a stag at bay.

"Master, you can whip me before the whole school to-morrow, with the whips you use on the other scholars, but I'll not let you and Mister Bolls tie me now and thrash me with those sticks."

"You will not let us whip you?" sneered the master.

"I will not," was the firm response.

"We shall see," and the two men started toward the youth.

But, quick as a flash, he turned and glanced

toward the windows in the end of the school-room.

They had been closed by one of the scholars.

As he looked his eyes fell upon a dark object resting along on the top of several hat-hooks.

It was his rifle, which he had brought, as often he was wont to do, to hunt for game on his way home after school.

In an instant he had sprung down the aisle between the desks and seized it.

The men were almost upon him when he threw it to his shoulder, with the cry:

"Stand back, master! stand back, Mister Bolls, or I will shoot you, for I will not be beaten like a dog!"

The two men halted as suddenly as though they had come against a stone wall.

They could not face that hunted boy at bay, and they hobbled down behind the desks with cries of alarm.

Seeing that he had frightened them, Duncan Dare burst out into a merry laugh, walked quickly toward the door and said:

"To-morrow, in school, master, you may whip me, but not now."

So saying he left the school-house, and walked swiftly away toward the forest.

CHAPTER V.

FLOGGED.

"MOTHER, the tiger has shown his teeth," said Duncan Dare, advancing to the piazza, where his mother sat alone, engaged in sewing, and watching the golden sunset.

The boy's face was flushed, and he carried the rifle upon one shoulder, while a string of game, squirrels and birds, hung across the other.

"Why, Duncan, what do you mean?" asked Mrs. Dare, glancing at her son, and adding:

"Why! what a nice string of game you have!"

"Yes, mother, and shot without a miss, for my aim was true this afternoon, although I had enough to unnerve me, for, as I said, the tiger showed his teeth to-day."

"Explain your meaning, my son, for I am at a loss to understand you."

"Here, 'Liza, take this string of game, and we will have some for supper," said Mrs. Dare, and, when the negress had departed with the game, she turned again to her son in an inquiring way.

"Old Silas tried to whip me to-day, mother."

"Ah, Duncan, you were wrong to provoke him to it," replied the mother.

"I did not do one act, mother, at first; but he accused me of not knowing my lessons, which was not true, and told me to remain in after school."

"Then he accused me of throwing a paper ball at him, when Robbie Fleming did it; but of course I would not tell on Robbie."

"As he kept at me, I determined to have the game as I was having the fame, so I cut some pegs and tacked Billy Morse to his seat, so he could not get up when called for his lesson."

"The scholars all laughed, and the dominie rushed at me and knocked me down—do you see where he struck me with his fist?"

"Oh, Duncan! your face is all bruised; why, oh why did he do a thing so cruel?"

"Because he hated me for saying what I did yesterday, mother; but that is not all, for when Jessie Hampton called out 'Shame!' he turned upon her to strike her with his stick, when I tore it from his hand and told him to whip me, but not her."

"Duncan, my poor boy!" groaned the mother.

"Then he made me remain after school, sent a note to Barney Bolls to come there, and after dismissing the scholars the two came forward to whip me, one with a rope to first tie me, and the other with several large sticks—sticks, mother, not whips."

"I determined not to let them flog me, and so I looked out how to escape, when I saw my rifle, which you know I often carry to school, and I sprung to it, seized it, and they quickly dropped down behind the benches when I told them I would shoot if they came on."

"Mother, it was awful funny to see those men hide, and I could not help laughing."

"It is no laughing matter, my poor boy, for you to threaten their lives."

"Mother, I did it to save my life, for I believe those men would have beaten me to death; but I told the dominie I would come back to-morrow and let him whip me before the school, provided he used a switch, and not the sticks, and I'll not complain."

"Oh, my son! my son!" cried Mrs. Dare, her deep emotion almost overcoming her.

"Mother, that is the man you said you would marry."

"Now what do you think of him?"

"Duncan, do not ask me, but this quarrel between you and Master Finn must end where it is, for it must go no further."

"Well, I'll let him flog me to-morrow, and I suppose he will cool off then; but that will be the last time he shall ever strike me," and Duncan went to his room to get ready for supper.

His mother seemed very sad all the evening, and retired early, and her distressed look the next morning, told Duncan, boy though he was, how deeply she had suffered.

But he bid her good-by, and started briskly off on his way to school.

"Good-morning, master," he said pleasantly, as he entered and found he was late; but then he knew that the dominie had called the scholars in earlier that morning when he saw that he was not there.

Silas Finn smiled grimly and said:

"You are late, Duncan Dare."

"Yes, sir, but I am here, and ready for my whipping."

"You shall have it, sir, before the day is over," was the stern response, and Duncan walked to his seat, the bruise on his forehead made by the master's fist showing plainly, and catching the eye of Jessie Hampton, who smiled sadly and shook her head.

When the noonday recess hour came, Dominie Finn gave out that there would be no afternoon school, as he had to attend to some work elsewhere, and then he called out fiercely:

"Duncan Dare, come here!"

The boy arose promptly and advanced to the front of the master, his face pale, but fearless.

"You evaded a whipping last evening by escaping from the school-house, and so I shall administer it now."

"Yes, master," was the calm response.

Silas Finn then took up one of half a dozen stout switches, and, amid a deathlike silence, said:

"Take off your jacket, Duncan Dare."

"Yes, sir," and the boy threw off his sailor-jacket.

Then down upon the broad young shoulders came the blow, but the boy did not flinch.

Again and again the stick rose and descended, and still the brave boy stood unmoved.

His face was as white as a corpse, his teeth were hard-set, and his hands clinched tight, while the sweat stood in beads upon his forehead.

Still no cry of pain came from him, although the cruel blows cut the skin.

At last the stick broke in two, but, with the same cruel smile, Silas Finn turned and took up another.

"Oh, master, for the love of God, stop!" came in a wail from Jessie Hampton, and the ice thus broken, from the lips of all the scholars went a plea for mercy.

But Silas Finn knew no such word as mercy, and again the blows descended thick and fast, until exhausted with passion and his wicked work, the master sat down.

"Go, now!" he said hoarsely.

Duncan Dare gave him one look, and all who saw it remembered it long after, when they had grown to be men and women, and he staggered toward the door, while Jessie Hampton sprung forward, seized his jacket and followed him, the rest of the scholars crowding after, for the master bade them go.

"Boys, some of you must go home with poor Duncan," said Jessie.

"No, I will go alone, for I want to think," said Duncan, and waving all back, he walked off alone and disappeared in the forest, Jessie still standing and looking after him as long as he was in sight.

CHAPTER VI.

SILAS FINN MAKES A VISIT.

UPON the afternoon following upon the cruel scene that occurred in the little school-house, Mrs. Dare was walking in her little flower-garden, looking after her roses, which she had seemed to neglect of late, though they had ever before had her greatest care.

A worried look rested upon her face, and the bright smile that was wont to rest there, had given place to a look of sadness and suffering.

Evidently her mind was ill at ease, and she seemed anxious and nervous, for she often forgot the work she was engaged in and stood like one in a deep reverie, a bunch of flowers in her hand.

Suddenly she glanced down the road and started.

Her eyes fell upon a horseman, and he was approaching the farm-house at a rapid trot.

It did not take her long to recognize in the horse Barney Bolls's old blind animal-of-all-work, and in the rider, Silas Finn.

Now, Silas was a learned man, and a good teacher, but he certainly was not a good rider.

He sat on a horse much after the style of a pair of tongs, and moved about upon his saddle as though it was scorching him.

He looked unhappy up there, and handled the reins much as though he was driving the animal instead of riding.

He had spruced himself up, but the exertion of his unusual exercise had gotten him all awry, and he was a sorry-looking creature when he half got off, half fell off at the hitching-post near the house.

Mrs. Dare had recognized him at a glance, and it seemed to add but a drop more to her bitterness, for her face became whiter, and the hand that held the roses trembled.

She walked toward the house, to anticipate 'Liza's coming after her, and entered the parlor where Silas Finn was surprised before the looking-glass, striving to re-arrange his disordered toilet.

"Mr. Finn," she said, as she entered the room.

The schoolmaster jumped as though her voice had been a pistol-shot.

"Ah! Mrs. Dare, I was just admiring your portrait as it was reflected in the mirror there. See! how distinctly it is revealed!"

Mrs. Dare knew that it was his own portrait that the master was admiring; but she said, quickly:

"No school this afternoon, Mr. Finn?"

"No, madam, the school was given a holiday this afternoon, for the fact is, I wished to come over and see you."

"Yet Duncan has not returned," she said, somewhat anxiously.

"No, but he will be along soon; but I regret to tell you, Mrs. Dare, that I was forced to chastise him to-day, though not so severely as he deserved."

"You have, then, struck my boy?" said Mrs. Dare, in a voice and manner that was threatening, yet seemingly she held herself under control.

"Mrs. Dare, I was forced to do as I did, for Duncan has been very unruly of late, and his example encouraged the other scholars to act rebellious.

"You know that I have been most kind in the past to Duncan, so much so that many have said he was my pet; but of late he has broken out in a number of different ways that I could not pass over, and so I had to let him be master or assert my authority, for he defied me."

"This is strange indeed, sir, for it is not my son's nature to be bad."

"When was it his conduct changed so?"

"The past two weeks."

"And it is just two weeks since I promised to become your wife?"

"Yes."

"And Duncan only knew of this yesterday?"

"From me, yes."

"I have not spoken on the subject to him before, for I dared not tell him what I had bound myself to."

"It is then so distasteful to you," sneered the schoolmaster.

"You know, sir, my motive, and you need not ask me; but certain it is, when you had my promise to marry you, then you began your persecutions of poor Duncan."

"Mrs. Dare, you surprise and pain me, for your words are not true."

"Duncan brought upon himself all he has received, and, if he intends to continue his defiant course, I shall have to drive him from the school."

"As it is, I should advise that you get him a berth aboard ship, for a few years at sea will make a man of him."

"Why do you wish me to send my boy upon the sea, the cruel sea that robbed me of my husband?" and the tears came into the beautiful eyes of Mrs. Dare.

"This is pleasant, to hear you speak thus of the late lamented David Dare," the schoolmaster said in a sneering tone.

"Mr. Finn, why need I disguise what I feel, when you so well know it?"

"But I regret deeply that you have brought it to open warfare between Duncan and yourself, for he is a high-spirited boy and will suffer deeply at heart for this, while he is not one to forgive a blow even from his school-teacher."

"Duncan has been full of mischief always, and has played a number of pranks about the neighborhood, but he is not a bad boy, and you were wrong to chastise him and before the school."

"I know my duties, madam, and I shall carry them out as I deem best."

"I rode over to see you, that you might know

the truth from my stand-point, rather than the garbled story from your son, and—”

“ Hold! Silas Finn, you shall not say that my son would lie, for I know that he would tell the truth, be it ever so much against him.

“ No, you felt your power over mother and son, and you make both of us feel it, and this is not only ungenerous, unkind, but it is wicked in you.

“ But I must be content with my lot as it is.”

“ Mistress Dare, you are hard on me; but my actions in the future will prove that you have wronged me in the past; but I would like to see Master Duncan here at home, in your presence, and have a sober talk with him as regards his future, for I do not wish to keep this quarrel up.”

“ Nor do I, but Duncan is not one to forgive and forget at the bidding.”

“ I will see if he has come,” and Mrs. Dare left the room, while Silas Finn again returned to the mirror to finish his interrupted primping.

His eyes had a cunning, wicked glare, and a look of triumph rested upon his face, while rubbing his hands together, as though in glee, he said:

“ Silas Finn, you are in luck at last, but that boy must go to sea, that is sure, for—”

The return of Mrs. Dare broke in upon him, and she said, quietly:

“ Duncan has not returned yet, Mr. Finn; he has doubtless stopped at some of the neighbors’, as he often does.”

Silas Finn bowed, and replied:

“ I will await some little time for him; but will he not keep you waiting for tea?”

“ Yes, for I never have a meal without him if I expect him home.”

The face of the schoolmaster changed, for he anticipated enjoying one of the delicious suppers for which Dare Homestead was famous; but night was near at hand, and he would not be caught out after dark, mounted as he was, and he inwardly cursed the boy for his delay, while a dread came over him that perhaps he had been too violent, and that Duncan was unable to come home.

Worried with this idea he at last decided to go, for he became more and more nervous as he dreaded harm to the boy.

“ I will have to go, Mistress Dare,” he at last said.

He was not invited to remain to supper, and Mrs. Dare arose, as though expecting him to depart at once.

“ I am sorry that Duncan delays us, but I will have a talk with him to-night.”

“ And tell him he must submit to the situation, Mrs. Dare, or if not, go to sea.”

“ I shall never urge my boy to leave me, for it would break my heart,” was the trembling reply.

“ I suppose you still keep to your compact with me?”

“ I have pledged you my word, sir, and I shall keep it,” was the cold reply.

“ Yes, I feel that you will; but good-by, Mistress Dare, and give my love to Duncan.”

The schoolmaster held out his hand, but the widow appeared not to see it, and his face darkened as he walked out of the parlor.

It was a funny sight to see him unhitch and mount his steed, which latter act he accomplished after some three efforts, one of which sent him clear over the back of the horse upon the ground on the other side.

But Mrs. Dare saw no amusement in it, for she stood like a statue gazing after him, and then, as he rode away she returned to the parlor and throwing herself upon the sofa her whole frame quivered with emotion, as she began to sob violently, and murmured:

“ Love, fear, and hatred, all struggling for the mastery—which will triumph?”

CHAPTER VII.

A BOY'S DESPAIR.

THE shadows of night had stolen over the land and sea, and the parlor had become dark, ere Mrs. Dare arose from the sofa, where she had long struggled in bitterness of soul.

The sky had become overcast with storm-clouds, and until the roll of thunder fell upon her ears, she seemed not to realize how time was passing.

Then, in a startled way she sprung to her feet and cried:

“ Well, I must face the ordeal, be it what it may; but oh! what a weight of woe, of coming evil, rests upon my heart.

“ Ah! a storm is coming up, and what has become of poor Duncan?

“ Great Heaven! can any harm have befallen him?”

In fear she ran from the room, to meet suddenly in the hall, Duncan Dare.

“ Oh Duncan, my poor boy! thank God you have come!” and she threw her arms around him.

He flinched at her touch, and said bitterly:

“ Be careful, mother, for old Finn's blows cut deep.”

“ Ha! you suffer? Come with me, quick!”

She led the way to her room, where 'Liza had placed a lamp, and then turned to the boy.

He was very pale, and his features were pinched with suffering, while he had a look that was not like any she had ever seen upon his handsome young face.

“ Mother, I took my whipping to-day, and uttered no moan of complaint, but see!”

He bared his shoulders and arms as he spoke, and a cry of anguish burst from the mother's lips as she beheld the bruised and bleeding flesh.

Silas Finn had indeed scored his victim, and the blows, both mother and son knew but too well, would leave scars that time would never efface.

Pallid, strangely calm, Mrs. Dare tenderly drew off the shirt, all stained with blood, and then dressed the wounds, uttering soothing words the while, as though to an infant.

Duncan never spoke, but his eyes burned brightly and his muscles seemed set in his endeavor to control himself.

At last the cruel cuts were dressed, and Mrs. Dare said:

“ Can you come down to supper, Duncan?”

“ No, mother, I could not eat, for food would choke me, and I wish to rest and will try and sleep; but I saw a schooner lying at anchor among the shoals off the beach, and there was no wind, so I fear she will be wrecked when the storm breaks.”

“ The storm seems a long way off yet, my son, and a wind may spring up meanwhile to enable her to get off, so do not worry about her.”

“ But even if she has wind, where she lies, she cannot get to sea without a pilot, so please have Dan go to Captain Hampton's and ask him to see to her safety, for I cannot.”

“ Dan shall start at once, Duncan, so now try and sleep.”

“ One moment, mother.”

“ Yes?”

“ Was Silas Finn here this afternoon?”

“ He was.”

“ And you have heard his story?”

“ Yes.”

“ Now hear mine, please.”

“ Not to-night, my son.”

“ Yes, to-night, mother, for then you will know just what occurred, and the truth,” and the boy told all that had happened.

Mrs. Dare's face showed that she believed him, but she uttered no word against Silas Finn.

“ Mother, do you still intend to marry that man?”

The question came terse, and in earnest.

“ Alas! Duncan, my son, I must do so.”

“ Must?”

“ Yes.”

“ Why, mother?”

“ Do not ask me, Duncan, but I repeat I shall marry Silas Finn, for I have pledged myself to do so.”

“ Mother, you will not break that pledge?”

“ No.”

“ For my sake, dear mother?”

“ Alas, no, for I cannot.”

A silence of a moment followed, and then Duncan said slowly:

“ Good-night mother; kiss me and let me sleep, for I am very tired, so very tired.”

She kissed him over and over again, and then softly left the room, a look upon her face which haunted him in after years.

“ Oh! Father in Heaven have mercy! I am but a boy in years, but in utter despair I know not what to do!” and the words came in bitter anguish from the lips of the brave boy, as he lay upon his little bed, his hands clinched over his pale face.

For a long time he lay thus, while the rumbling of the thunder grew louder and louder, showing that the storm was coming nearer and nearer.

About the house all was silent, and at last he arose.

Quickly, yet noiselessly he moved about the room, and in a short while he had rolled up a small bundle, tying it tight.

Then he opened a drawer and took therefrom a few pieces of gold, his savings of the past few years from the little sums his mother had given him.

Silently he stood glancing around the room,

as though to picture it upon his memory, and then, putting out the lamp, walked out into the hallway.

All was silence and darkness.

No light shone in his mother's room, and the kitchen was also in gloom.

The front door he found, to his surprise, unlocked, for he left that way, not wishing to be seen by any one who might be up.

Out upon the piazza, across the lawn he went, when suddenly a loud bark was heard, and a huge dog came bounding toward him.

“ Down, Savage—down, sir! don't you know me?”

The dog recognized his young master, and started to trot along by his side.

“ No, you must go back, Savage, for your home is there, and I have no home now.

“ Go back, sir!”

His voice trembled as he spoke, and the dog skulked back to the house slowly, while Duncan Dare swiftly walked away, plunging into the forest, and following the path he was wont to take in going to school.

Suddenly he started, for a form came before him.

“ Ho, Dan! is this you?”

“ Yes sah, dis me,” answered one whose voice betrayed him as a negro.

“ What are you doing here?”

“ Miss Mary want me to go to Cap'n Ham-ton's sah, and told him that a skunner is lyin' off-shore; but there be a grave-yard on each road, and sperrits walks o' stormy nights, Mas' Dunken, and bress your soul, I was 'feard to go, so I jist been waitin' here tryin' to see ef some one wouldn't come along that I could tell 'em.”

“ Dan you are a coward; but go to the house and I will see about the schooner, and mind you, don't tell mother you met me, or any one else, should you see them to-night.”

“ No sah, I goin' right to bed; and the negro departed glad to be relieved of his disagreeable duty, which had caused him to lie in sight of the house for over an hour trying to gather up his courage to go on his errand.

But into the dark forest went Duncan Dare, for fear was foregn to his nature, and in his present anguish, with despair at his heart, he would have faced any danger that might confront him.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS SCHOONER.

THE storm which had been threatening since sunset, had gradually spread over the entire heavens, and the clouds had become as black as ink.

The distant thunder, at first a mere rumble, had grown louder and louder as the elements collected toward one storm-center.

Yet so far not a breath of air fell upon land or sea.

In the early afternoon a schooner was coming close in-shore, and slowly heading along the coast.

In her foretop was a man in officer's uniform, and he seemed to be closely observing the lay of the land, dotted as it was, a short distance back from the coast, with farm-houses, and beyond was a small village.

“ Ho the top!” suddenly called out a voice from the deck.

“ Ay, ay, sir.”

“ What prospects ashore?”

“ About as promised, sir, for the village lies inland, and there are a number of prosperous farms surrounding,” came the answer from the foretop.

“ I don't like the looks of the water hereabout, and there are shoals in this locality,” called out the one who had hailed from the deck.

“ The sea has a shallow look and I don't like it myself, sir; but the lead will tell the depth.”

“ Ay, ay! cast the lead!” was the quick response.

A moment after came the cry from forward.

“ Three fathoms!”

“ Ah! this is shallow indeed, and our keel thirteen feet under water.

“ Does it look the same all about here, Lennox?” asked the man on deck.

“ There are patches of dark blue here and there, sir, which denote deeper water, but I think we are in the midst of a group of shoals.”

“ Then I shall put to sea and await another night, for I don't wish this slowly-rising storm to catch us here.”

“ Two fathoms!” sung out the leadsman quickly, and instantly came the order:

“ Down with your helm! quick, my man, and we'll get out of this.”

But the wind suddenly died away, the tide

was setting shoreward, and the anchor had to be dropped.

Then, down from the top came the officer, and as he reached the quarter-deck, the other who had called to him, said in a low tone:

"This looks bad, Lennox."

"It does indeed, Captain Carl, for we are not a mile off-shore, the tide is landward, the storm coming up from shoreward, and the water does not average three fathoms."

"Curses on that fellow! I wonder if he sent us here to wreck us?"

"I think not, sir; but still, we are in a bad way."

"There is an inlet near, but I do not know what depth of water is in it, and no pilot could be found here to come off to us."

"Still the Spitfire's good-luck must not fail her, and I hope we will come out all right, for this storm may blow over."

"Yes, or wind enough spring up to allow us to get out to sea; but in the mean time, as soon as it is dark, I shall make a landing to see what I can discover."

"Yes, sir, for we can easily return to the schooner if the storm breaks."

The two speakers were young men, and their dress was that of naval officers.

Their faces were darkened by long exposure, and they had the appearance of men who lived well.

One was a brunette, the other a blonde, and both were fine looking, though on the face of each rested an expression of recklessness that was strongly marked.

The schooner was of about ninety tons burden, very narrow and long, and, as one of the officers had remarked regarding her thirteen feet draught, lay low in the water.

She was weather-beaten too, her sails were old and patched, there were scars upon her hull, and she appeared to have seen hard service; but withal, her model was perfect, and every spar was trim and graceful.

Upon her deck were three broadside guns, twelve-pounders, and forward and aft she carried a pivot eighteen, giving her eight pieces of ordnance, in all, and so mounted as to give her five shots to a broadside.

Her guns and light armament all appeared to have been well used, and there was a look of work about her that showed she had not been idle.

At her peak hung listlessly a United States flag, and forward were her crew, grouped together, and gazing at the shore, with its apparently happy homes dotting the landscape.

The sea was like glass, and the schooner rose and fell gracefully, tugging lightly at her anchor upon the ocean swell.

Night soon came on, and then all was darkness, for the stars were shut from view by the clouds.

Then a boat was lowered, and into it got the man Captain Carl and a dozen seamen, which was one-third of the force on the schooner.

"Success, captain!" said Lennox, as the boat moved off.

"I hope so; but Lennox, have all in readiness to run out and meet the storm, and may this night's work enable our cruise to end."

"Amen!" called out Lennox, and as the boat disappeared in the gloom, he set the men on board the schooner to work.

The topmasts were housed, the sails reefed, another anchor was let fall, and all made ready to meet the storm, whose mutterings grew louder and louder.

"The storm is sweeping around, and if it does, and heads from seaward, this schooner is doomed with all on board," said Lennox, as he earnestly watched the gathering gale, and then tried to pierce the darkness to landward, in a vain effort to discover the returning boat.

CHAPTER IX.

SWIMMING TO THE RESCUE.

THE storm certainly came up very slowly, but it seemed to be steadily gathering all its forces, to strike savagely when its fury broke loose.

Anxiously the young officer on the schooner watched its approach, and the men forward shook their heads with ominous dread when they saw that the gale was sweeping around seaward, and when it broke would haul them upon a lee shore.

"Do you see the boat returning, sir?" asked a voice from the cabin, though the speaker was not visible.

"I do not, I am sorry to say. Oh, yes! I hear the oar-strokes, and it is coming off," was the answer.

Soon after a dark object appeared in the gloom, and Lennox called out sharply:

"Boat ahoy!"

"Spitfire," was the stern reply, and a moment more and the boat was alongside.

"Well, sir?" queried Lennox anxiously.

"It was a failure, for I was thwarted; but another time I may accomplish my purpose."

"Now we must look to the schooner's safety."

"All has been done that can be done."

"I do not doubt that; but this calm still continues."

"Yes, sir, and the storm comes now down upon us from seaward."

"So I saw, and that hastened my return."

"I have both anchors down, and plenty of cable."

No anchors, I fear, will hold us here, for the bottom is sandy and they will drag; but yet we can do nothing but depend upon them, wait the first springing up of the gale, and then try to get out to sea."

"It is our only chance, Captain Carl; but I fear we are in a bad way, for shoals are all about us."

"I was a fool not to get a pilot before I came here."

"But where would you get one, sir?"

"True, we have done the best we could under the circumstances, and we can but bide the result; was the reckless answer, and Captain Carl descended into the cabin, leaving Lennox on deck, while the crew of the boat were hastily hauling it up to the davits and making it secure.

The guns had been securely lashed, all made shipshape on deck, and the life-lines run along the bulwarks from stem to stern while the capstan bars were in place, ready to run the anchor up at a moment's notice.

Louder and louder resounded the thunder, and darker and darker grew the gloom.

The surf fell with ominous roar upon the beach, and in the silence resting over all the distant howling of a watch-dog came distinctly to the ears of those who were on the schooner's deck.

The crew spoke in whispers, when they spoke at all, and the shadow of death seemed to cast a pall over the craft.

"This silence is awful, and I will call the captain on deck," said Lucas Lennox with a shudder, and just then Captain Carl came out of the cabin.

"This looks bad, Lennox," he said, casting his eyes about him.

"It does, sir, for the storm will soon break, and there is not a breath of air yet."

"It looks black enough for us indeed; but the Spitfire is a stanch craft, and our luck may not desert us, though mine did ashore—what was that?"

"It seemed like a cry out upon the waters."

"So it did—hark! there it is again."

"Schooner ahoy!" came across the waters in a clear voice.

"Ay, ay! Whereaway?" answered Captain Carl.

"Off your starboard quarter, a cable's length!"

"Ay, ay, come aboard!"

"Send a boat for me, please, for I am swimming against the tide and am tired out," said the voice out upon the black waters.

"In the saints' name, what does this mean?

"But lower the gig, lads, and pull hard for the brave fellow, for he may know this coast and be a godsend to us."

The boat was launched in an instant, almost; and away it sped over the waters, pulled by strong arms.

"Whereaway?" called out the coxswain.

"Here! and I am very tired," came the reply.

A moment more and the men rested upon their ears, and then a hand grasped the gunwale.

It was the bold swimmer, and he was drawn into the boat, which at once pulled back toward the schooner.

"Pull hard, men, for that storm is coming, and you must get out of this, for you have dropped anchor in the very worst place on this coast," said the swimmer.

The men obeyed with a will, and soon the swimmer stood on the quarter-deck, where the light of the companionway fell full upon him.

It was Duncan Dare, white-faced, haggard, yet calm and fearless.

His shoes had been removed, and along with his jacket, swung at his back in a bundle, while the water dripped from his saturated clothing to the deck.

"You are but a boy!" said Captain Carl in surprise.

"Yes, sir—in years," was the low reply.

"What were you doing in the sea at night?"

"Swimming out to this schooner."

"Ah! for what purpose?"

"You have dropped anchor where no anchor will hold, and in half an hour after yonder storm breaks, your schooner would be in pieces."

"Ha! I suspected as much; but are you a pilot?"

"I know the coast well, sir."

"And can you get us out of here?"

"Yes, sir, when we get more wind."

"Do so and I will pay you well in gold, my boy, gold that was earned with a rope about our necks, so that it is doubly valuable."

Duncan Dare started; but appearing not to notice the words of the schooner's captain, he said:

"I do not care for your gold, sir, but I did not wish to see your vessel wrecked, and, as I wanted a berth as cabin-boy, was anxious to see if you would take me."

"Willingly, and you look like one who will make a man of himself, while that you have tremendous pluck, your swim out here proves."

"Do you live on this coast?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

"And you will go to sea?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is your name?"

"Dare, sir."

"Well, you are well named, though I half suspect you are hiding your real name."

"Still, that is no matter, and you shall be well treated here."

"But can you run the schooner into the inlet near we saw before dark?"

"How much does she draw, sir?"

"Thirteen feet."

"Yes, sir, for there are seventeen in the inlet with this tide, and there will be more when the storm breaks, but you had better stand out to sea."

"No, I have a duty to perform on this coast, and it must be done, and you shall be my guide to the spot I seek."

"What vessel is this, sir?"

"The Spitfire."

"A United States cruiser?"

"A cruiser, my lad, but under a flag which, if hanging at the peak now, you would be unable to see, as it is just the hue of the night."

"The black flag?" said Duncan, in surprise.

"You have struck it, my lad."

"Then, sir, I shall pilot you out to sea, but not into the inlet, for I will not aid you to put foot on yonder coast," was the bold reply.

"You will do as I order you, boy, or I'll trice you up and flog you into the humor of obedience," was the angry reply.

"You may flog me to death, pirate captain, but I'll never pilot you into the inlet," was the bold response of Duncan Dare as he stood bare-headed, bare-footed, and with his little bundle at his back, in defiance before the self-confessed buccaneer.

CHAPTER X.

DUNCAN DARE'S DEFIANCE.

THE bold attitude of Duncan Dare amazed the captain of the schooner and his lieutenant.

That a boy had dared to swim out to the vessel to save her from destruction was remarkable, and when on board and discovering her lawless character, he refused to do as ordered, was something the two officers could not understand.

"Boy, you must not throw a defiance in my teeth, for I am not one to submit to it, and on this deck my word is law," sternly said Captain Carl, though at the same time he could not but admire the pluck of the lad.

"I do not defy you, sir; I only say that I will not pilot your vessel into the inlet, where you can make a landing and harm those who are dear to me."

"I swam out here, sir, because I wanted to save your vessel, and also to see if I could get a cabin boy's berth, as I wish to leave home."

"Will you remain with me as cabin boy after we sail from here?" asked Captain Carl.

"I will remain, sir, as long as I have to, but I would like to go ashore in some port far from here, for I do not care to become a pirate."

"Who said this was a pirate vessel?"

"To-day I saw the United States flag flying from the peak, and now, sir, if you will glance upward, as the companionway light is thrown upon it, you will see the skull and cross-bones."

The pirate looked up and laughed, while he replied:

"Well, you are a brave boy, and I do not wish to quarrel with you; in fact, I need you on board my vessel; but you must run the schooner into the inlet, as I promise you I did not come here to harm any one."

"Why do you wish to make a landing here?"
To look after some business that will pay me well, and which I do not wish to neglect."

"The storm will soon break, sir, and I will run you out to sea, for as I said this anchorage will wreck you."

"I wish to enter the inlet, my lad."

"I cannot pilot you there, sir."

"You mean that you *will not*?"

"Yes, sir."

"I will give you a small fortune in gold if you will," earnestly said Captain Carl.

"Gold will not tempt me, sir, for I have over fifty dollars with me."

The two officers laughed at the lad's idea of a fortune, and Captain Carl said:

"I will give you a thousand dollars if you will run the schooner into the inlet."

"No, sir; I will not do it."

"Two thousand."

"I may not know the value of money as you do, sir, but nothing you would offer me could make me do as you wish."

"Boy, you must do as I say."

"I will not, sir, though I'll save the schooner by running her out to sea, for we will have wind soon."

"By Heaven! into the inlet you take her, for I'll stand no more begging a boy."

Duncan made no reply, but his face was set with stern resolve.

"Do you understand, boy, that you are to obey?"

"I will not touch that wheel, sir, to head for the inlet, if I die for not doing so."

"Then die you shall, you stubborn young satan."

"Lennox!"

"Ay, ay, captain."

"Take your sword and place the point over that boy's heart!"

"Yes, sir," and the sharp-pointed blade was pressed against the broad breast of the daring boy, while Captain Carl took out his watch, and stepping nearer to Duncan Dare, continued:

"Now, Lennox, this boy has just one minute to decide whether he shall live or die."

"If you refuse, my lad, to pilot my schooner into the inlet, this officer shall drive his sword through your heart."

Duncan Dare stood upright, fearless, defiant.

Bareheaded and barefooted, his little bundle, hat and shoes, still hung at his back, he presented a striking picture, and his bold attitude won the admiration of the two pirate officers.

In a clear voice came his answer to Captain Carl:

"You need not wait for the time to be up, Pirate Captain, to kill me, for I will die before I obey you."

Captain Carl was staggered, but he still stood watch in hand, apparently awaiting the time to pass away.

With his sword-point pressed against Duncan Dare's heart, stood Lennox, stern and silent, and perfectly calm was the boy, his fearless face turned upon Captain Carl.

"A few more seconds only, so speak, what will you do, boy?"

"You have my answer, pirate captain."

"Lennox, you hear what the boy says, so—"

"Hold! would you destroy your own lives by killing that boy?"

With the thrilling words, a form glided from the cabin, the sword of Lucas Lennox was struck up, and the one who so boldly interfered, faced the pirate officers.

It was a woman, or rather a young girl, for she was not yet out of her teens.

She was very beautiful in face, very graceful in form.

Her hair was golden, her eyes blue as the sea, and she was clad in a suit of dark cloth, close-fitting to her elegant form.

Pale-faced, haggard, she looked, yet the beauty of her features had not been destroyed by the suffering through which she seemed to have passed.

The two officers started at her act, and a scowl came upon the brow of Captain Carl, while Duncan Dare seemed surprised at the startling interference for his sake.

"Kate, why do you interfere with me thus?" sternly said Captain Carl.

"I interfere to save my own life, and this vessel and crew, as well as that boy."

"I have heard what was said about your present anchorage, and, in the storm that is about to break upon us, you are going to kill the only one that can save the vessel from destruction."

"By Jupiter! but you are right!" exclaimed Captain Carl, and then, as he drew the young girl one side, he said:

"I had no idea of killing the brave boy, for he will be priceless to me in the future."

"I only meant to frighten him."

"Bah! Have you no powers of perception, Carl Casandra, after your long life among men, to believe you could frighten that boy?"

"Did he not take his life in his hands to come out here to your vessel, and has he not got it in him to die rather than submit?"

"Egad, but you are right, Miss Kenyon, as you always are, except in your little eccentricity of not marrying me when you know me as I am."

"I loved you as an honorable man, Carl Casandra, for so I believed you; but I despise you as a pirate," she said with a sneer.

"You will overcome that, Kate—but see, the storm is upon us, and you must retire to the cabin."

"No, I will remain on deck, and see that brave boy save this ship, though perhaps it were better if he let it go to destruction, with all on board."

"I think otherwise," was Captain Carl's remark, and turning to Duncan, he continued:

"You said your name was Dare?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, Master Dare, your life is safe, sir, and I wish you to take the helm and pull the craft out of her present peril, after which I will talk to you about a position on board: for, if you can manage a vessel in this storm, young as you are, you are fully capable of being an officer, and I am really in need of a second luff."

"Now, sir, do your best, f'r the Spitfire is in your hands, and our lives depend upon you."

Duncan simply bowed, cast his bundle from his back, and the maiden picked it up and took it into the cabin, while the youth stepped to the helm.

Instantly his clear voice rung out:

"Up with these anchors, men, and lively, for we want them off the bottom when yonder gale strikes us!"

The crew sprung to the windlass, the anchors left the bottom, and were soon in place, and not a moment too soon, for, howling with fierce fury, the wind came rushing over the sea, driving a wall of foaming water before it that threatened to engulf the stanch schooner.

"Hold hard, for your lives!" shouted Captain Carl, and he sprung to the side of Kate Kenyon; but she waved him back, and stepping quickly to the wheel, clung to it.

"I must have aid here, sir," cried Duncan, as he saw the storm almost upon them.

"I will aid you, for I am a sailor's daughter, and know what is to be done," said the maiden, quietly.

"I fear you are not strong enough, miss," Duncan rejoined.

"If I prove not so, then call for help; but I wish to remain on deck."

The next moment the storm was upon the devoted schooner, the bows thrown high in the air, as though dashed upon a watery wall, and the brave craft staggered, reeled and plunged under the terrible shock.

Here and there a poor unfortunate was torn from his hold and borne off to die, but the schooner stood the blow nobly, and after the first shock went bounding along into the very teeth of the gale, held on her course seaward by the strange couple at her wheel, Duncan Dare, the Boy Refugee, and Kate Kenyon, the lady love of a pirate captain.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MIDNIGHT MURDER.

AFTER his departure from the Dare Farm, Silas Finn went on his way homeward, mounted upon the blind nag of Barney Bolls.

"I would prefer to walk," he frequently muttered to himself as he rode along, and when at last he drew rein at the village store he was greatly delighted that his horseback exercise was nearly over.

He was greeted with a welcome by those congregated at the store, for they had never seen the schoolmaster on horseback before.

After making a few purchases, Silas Finn started homeward; but he had not the courage to mount in the presence of the crowd, and so walked off, leading the animal to its stable.

Barney Bolls was just sitting down to tea.

He lived on a large farm, with only an old man and his wife to care for him, for he let the lands out on shares, and he got the lion's share, too.

The house was an old one, large, and in a very dilapidated condition, for Barney Bolls and the old couple were content with four rooms in a wing of the rambling old structure.

The old man-servant led the mare away to the tumble-down stable, and Barney invited Silas Finn to come in and have supper, for the two were great chums.

"No, Barney; a storm is brewing, and I must hasten home," said the master, who knew Barney Bolls never had much more for supper than a crust of bread and a cup of tea.

"Did you see the widow?" asked Barney, who never urged his visitor to remain.

"Yes, I saw her."

"And the boy?"

"He had not returned home when I left, but I suppose he's all right."

"Haven't seen him, have you?"

"No, but I guess you didn't hurt him."

"Oh, no, for he's a tough one; and I didn't whip him hard enough to make him cry, or even beg."

"Then you were most gentle with him; but what did the widow say?"

"It pained her to think that her son was so wicked, though she scolded me a little for whipping her boy."

"She's a fine woman, Mr. Bolls."

"Yes, master, she is, but she's proud as Lucifer."

"What! going?"

"Yes, I don't like that storm yonder, and will get home; besides, I don't feel very bright to-night, and have a heaviness at my heart I cannot throw off."

"Yes, I feel that same way at times; but good-night, Master Silas."

"Good-night, to you, Barney Bolls."

So saying, Silas Finn walked away from the rickety old mansion, muttering:

"I would not stay all night in that rickety old house for it."

"Ugh! the ghosts of a grim past would be ever before me there, though the school-house, with its surrounding graves, is bad enough."

After a walk of a quarter a mile through the darkness, he came in sight of the school-house.

It looked weird-like in its silence and desolation, for no light was visible, and it loomed up in the glare of the lightning in a spectral way.

The grave-stones seemed to stand out like specters to the eyes of Silas Finn as though they were the very spirit forms of those who lay buried beneath.

The old elms stood motionless, for there was not a breath of air, and the roar of the surf, half a mile away, was dirge-like in its monotony.

Gliding along the path that wound among the graves, glancing about him in a nervous way, Silas Finn reached the school-house door.

Quickly he entered, and, slamming it behind him, forgot, in his frightened haste, to bolt or bar it.

Ascending the narrow stairs he entered his rooms, and his trembling hands found some difficulty in lighting a lamp.

The fact was that Silas Finn used more oil, the storekeeper said, than any family in the village, and he got the credit of studying all night, for no one ever passed the school-house, late or early, that there was not a light within.

In the light Silas Finn had not the fear that possessed him in the darkness, and the little floor above the school-room had a lamp burning in each room from sunset to sunrise.

He had overstayed his time, and darkness had caught him, so Silas Finn had to enter his house where no light greeted him.

A sigh of relief burst from his lips, when he had lighted his second lamp, and then he turned to the fire-place to prepare his supper.

A stick fire was soon burning, a pot of coffee was put on, a skillet with bacon and potatoes, and a corn hoe-cake was baked in the ashes.

But the schoolmaster seemed to have no appetite for food.

Perhaps the thought of leaving one of the widow Dare's delicious suppers, rendered him dissatisfied with his own rude meal; but certain it is, that a cup of coffee satisfied him, and he turned away from the table and entered his sleeping-room.

It was a comfortable chamber, large, well-furnished, and neatly kept, although Silas Finn was his own housekeeper.

Drawing a chair up to a large table, he arranged the light to suit him, and then going to the large fireplace, placed his hand up the chimney, and took from their sooty hiding-place, a bunch of keys.

With one of these he unlocked a large wooden chest, which was in one corner of the room, and took therefrom, a roll of papers.

This he stretched out upon the table, fastening the ends down.

It looked like a map, from the lines drawn up.

on it, and that it had been often used, was shown by its worn edges and stained look.

Putting on a pair of spectacles, Silas Finn seated himself in his easy chair, and bent over the map.

With his knife-blade, he traced different lines, and at last muttered:

"I have tried over and over again to find the hiding-place upon this map; but I must have made some mistake in the drawing."

"Well, I can but keep up the search, and if I do discover it, then the widow's little fortune I'll have no need of."

"It worries me, that boy not having gone home, and I hope he is all right; but he is a devil, and there is no telling what he might do to give me trouble."

"How still the night is, for there is not a breath of air stirring, and this storm has been threatening for hours, and yet holds off."

"I guess the schooner I saw lying among the shoals off the inlet, will be driven ashore."

"So be it, others have been lost there before."

"Now, to study this map, and see if I cannot hit upon the hiding-place," and he bent in silence over the map.

For a long time he seemed to be studying the lines and dots, and was so wrapped up with the work he was engaged in, that he failed to hear a light step in the adjoining room, and then to see a form come forward into the open doorway.

There the mysterious intruder halted suddenly, stood an instant in silence, and then came the words:

"Silas Finn, we meet again, and you shall die."

"Thus I keep my oath!"

A wild cry broke from Silas Finn as the voice aroused him from his work, and with pallid face, staring eyes and chattering teeth, he attempted to spring to his feet.

But the hand of the one in the doorway was thrust forward, there followed a flash and report, and Silas Finn sunk back in his chair, his head falling upon the map which he had been so earnestly studying from some mysterious reason known only to himself.

CHAPTER XII.

A NIGHT OF TERROR.

JUST as the storm broke in fury over land and sea, howling through the forests and laying large trees prostrate in its path, a form staggered out of the little school-house where dwelt Silas Finn.

It was the form of a woman, and her hands were stretched out above her head, as she sped along, flying away from the spot, as though in terror of the graves about her, for, had it been the tempest she feared, she would have sought refuge in the house.

"My God! my God! can I forget the scene beneath that roof?"

"No, never! never! never!" cried the woman, and she sped along at a rapid run.

The school-house and graveyard were left quickly behind her, and, taking the ocean highway, she went into the very face of the gale.

The wild winds seized her skirts and whipped them into ribbons, while her hair, blown from its fastenings, streamed far out behind her.

In the teeth of such a tempest she could hardly walk; but on she struggled, ever and anon glancing behind her with apparent dread of being pursued.

On, on, she struggled, across a moor, then under the shelter of some sand dunes, then into a forest that bordered the sea.

Here, worn out utterly, she dropped down in the shelter of a huge tree, and bitter moans broke from her lips.

The wind-storm had now seemingly spent its fury, and the rain descended in perfect sheets of water, beating upon the uncovered head and slender form of the woman, as she crouched by the trunk of the sheltering tree.

The thunder rolled incessantly, and the lightning seemed fairly to set the earth on fire, while peal after peal that fairly shook the forest burst forth from the inky clouds.

Kneeling, her face buried in her hands, her body bent forward and clinging close to the huge tree, the woman remained for a long, long time.

The moans that broke from her lips proved how she suffered, and the rain beat pitilessly down upon her.

At last the storm passed over, though the winds still blew strong, and skurrying clouds were darkening the heavens.

With an effort the woman arose, and looked about her.

A tree not far distant had been torn to atoms

by a stroke of lightning, while another, still nearer had been uprooted by the tempest and lay across her path.

Still she had seemed not to see, or know, of the destruction about her.

After a moment of hesitation, and eagerly glancing about her, she started forward, going deeper into the forest.

Her steps were hesitating, yet on she went, and, looking neither to the right or to the left, she held on her way through the woodland path.

A walk of half a mile brought her out into a clearing.

A field lay before her, and skirting it, keeping by the fence, she soon came to an orchard of apple trees.

Through this she passed and before her loomed up a house.

Softly she moved now, through a small gate that let her out upon a lawn, and encircling the house she ascended to the front piazza.

She placed her hand upon the door-knob and it yielded to her touch.

Then she turned, glanced back the way she had come, and disappeared within the house, the door closing behind her, just as a huge dog, with savage bark came rushing around the house and upon the piazza.

The house she had entered was the *Dare Homestead*.

CHAPTER XIII. THE DISCOVERY.

THE morning following the severe punishment of Duncan Dare, at the hands of the merciless schoolmaster, the scholars wended their way to school with considerable wonderment as to what would occur that day.

They knew that Duncan Dare had been most severely dealt with, and the blows had cut deep into his flesh; but they were aware of the boy's indomitable will, and expected to see him at school in spite of his terrible flogging.

Even the truants, when it became noised about that Duncan Dare had at last fallen under the master's rod, went to school.

The storm of the night had done much damage, for houses had suffered in many cases, fences had been blown down and trees were uprooted, while the torrents of water that had fallen had made large washouts in the road.

The school-house, however, still stood firm, and the first scholars to arrive simply put their hats and books away, and came out to await the coming of the others, for the door of the school-room was open.

In twos and threes the scholars arrived, until before opening hour all were there with one exception.

That exception was Duncan Dare.

He had not yet put in an appearance.

Could it mean that he had been too badly hurt by the master, to come?

Or, could it be that his mother would not allow him to come any more?

Various surmises were given, and at last Jessie Hampton was asked her opinion of her boy lover's absence.

She said that she did not feel that Duncan would be able to come, and all the scholars united in their sympathy for the missing boy.

Their words brought the tears into Jessie's pretty eyes, and then she entered the school-room and took her seat at her desk.

As she raised the lid she started.

There, upon a pile of books, and so placed that she could not fail to see it, was a note.

It was addressed in a distinct, but boyish hand to

"MISS JESSIE HAMPTON,
The School-house."

Hastily Jessie opened it, for she recognized the writing, and read as follows:

"HOME, AT NIGHT.

"Oh, Jessie! how can I write good-by to you? But it must be done, and so I say it now with my pen—good-by! perhaps a last good-by!

"Jessie, I leave home to-night.

"It may be for years,
It may be forever,

as I know not where I go or what is before me: but, dear Jessie, I cannot remain here, for I have been flogged before you and before all my fellow-scholars, and I am ashamed to look you in the face now.

"I meant not to bring the dominie's anger upon me, and it was not what I did in school that made him mad, but what I said to him about not wishing my dear good mother to marry him.

"He has asked her to marry him, Jessie, and she has said yes; but I told him he never should, and so he sought revenge upon me.

"I am but a boy, Jessie, but the dominie should not have whipped me as he did.

"But I cannot stay here, so I leave to-night, and I

shall follow the sea, and hope to rise above the of a common sailor.

"But it almost breaks my heart to leave you, Jessie, and my good mother; but some day you may hear from me again.

"Be true to me through all, Jessie, and believe in the love of
Your Boy Schoolmate,

"DUNCAN DARE."

"Gone! he has gone from me!" cried Jessie, in girlish despair at the flight of her lover, and she burst into tears.

Some of her girl friends came in, and they too read the letter, and it soon passed around the school.

Where had Duncan gone?

What would he become? What would folks say? What would Dominie Finn say?

Such were the questions asked and unanswered.

But where was Dominie Finn?

It was time for the opening of school, and yet he had not come down-stairs.

Why was he, ever so punctual, late?

"Perhaps he's sick," suggested one.

But still the dominie did not appear, and Jessie said she would go up and knock at his door, show him Duncan's letter and ask to go home, for she did not feel well.

Opening the door into the little hall, she ascended the narrow stairs, and found the door above ajar.

A timid knock brought no response, and Jessie entered.

It was the kitchen and dining-room, and no fire was on the hearth, but a lamp burned on the table.

"Why, the dominie has overslept himself," she said, and she crossed the room to knock at the other door.

Still no response came, and she timidly glanced within.

There sat the master, his head upon his arms, which were stretched out across the table.

By his side still burned a lamp.

"Master! master! wake up!" called Jessie.

Still no answer, and then she stepped forward to awake him by a touch, while she said:

"How very soundly he sleeps."

Then those below, the waiting scholars, heard a wild, a piercing shriek ring through the school-house, followed by a heavy fall, and in dismay the bolder ones dashed up-stairs.

What a scene met their gaze.

Jessie lay unconscious on the floor, the open letter of Duncan Dare in her hand.

At the table still sat the master; but there was a small stream of blood trickling down upon the floor.

"The master is dead! he has been killed!" shouted one of the larger boys as he gazed at him.

"And Jessie is dead! run for help!" cried another, and in dismay the children rushed from the room, leaving the unconscious girl and the dead master together.

But help soon came, in Barney Bolls and others, and Jessie was taken to her home, wholly overcome by the shock, while the schoolmaster was laid out in the room that had so long been his home.

But who had been the murderer?

Jessie's letter, the flight, the threat, all pointed to Duncan Dare, and upon him fell the brand of murdering his schoolmaster, Silas Finn, in revenge for the severe punishment he had received at his hands.

CHAPTER XIV.

BRANDED.

ONE from sympathy, another from curiosity, and a third from duty, started over to Dare homestead an hour after the discovery of the murdered schoolmaster, to see the widow Dare, whose son had slain Silas Finn in revenge and then taken flight.

One of the trio was Barney Bolls, and he went from curiosity, to see just how the widow would receive the news of the master's death and her son's flight.

He was revengeful, and he wished to see the woman suffer for having refused his hand and love.

The second one was the father of Jessie Hampton, a man of wealth, who dwelt in the grandest mansion in all that part of the country, and who was known as the Squire, for in the past he had sat in judgment upon wrong-doers; he went from a sense of sympathy with the poor mother of Duncan Dare, though perhaps duty also called him there.

The third was the county officer, or constable, and his duty was to discover what he could of the case, and endeavor to find the fugitive boy, to bring him back to justice.

So the three mounted their horses and rode to Dare homestead, the squire having left his daughter in the care of competent nurses and the village doctor.

As the trio rode up to the door of the pleasant home and dismounted, they were met by 'Liza, and her appearance showed them that some one had been before them, for bad news travels fast.

"Oh! squire, mistis hab heerd some awful bad news, and she am almost dead, sah; but I see if you can see her, sah," and leaving the visitors to find seats upon the piazza, 'Liza disappeared within the house.

The squire was a man of large stature, with a kindly, benevolent face, though he was very proud of his aristocratic blood and riches, it was said.

Still he was a stern-looking man, and looked very serious as he sat there upon the piazza, awaiting the return of the negress.

Barney Bolls looked sinister and triumphant, his cunning face seeming to gloat in the misery of the mother over the act of her son.

The constable was a sun-brown man of forty, rough-looking, big-hearted, brave as a lion, and who loved the widow and had been greatly attached to Duncan, for he kept muttering to himself:

"I never could have believed it of that boy, squire."

"Nor I," returned the squire each time.

"There's no telling what he would do," Barney Bolls had each time put in, but he had met only a scowl from Constable Kane.

To the surprise of the three visitors, Mrs. Dare came to meet them with perfect calmness.

Her face showed how she suffered, and her eyes were red with weeping, but she was composure itself, and she greeted them quietly and pleasantly, excepting Barney Bolls, to whom she merely bowed coldly.

"Gentlemen, be seated, please," she said, and then she continued:

"I believe I can say that I know the nature of your call, for you have found Master Silas Finn murdered in his school-house, and you are here to arrest my boy as the murderer."

"You have then already heard of the sad tidings, widow Dare?" said the squire.

"Evil tidings travel fast, sir," was the reply.

"And what do you think of the affair?"

"I know not what to think, but I am convinced that my son did not kill the master."

"I wish we could think so, madam; but as Master Duncan has fled the country, I fear it is too true, especially after putting together all that we have heard from the children of the occurrences of the past two days," said Constable Nat Kane.

"This letter was left by Duncan for my little daughter Jessie, and was found in her desk, and this gives proof that your son was at the schoolhouse in the night, and with this chain of evidence, the threat he made against the schoolmaster—as Mr. Bolls here heard him—the thrashing he received, and his flight, all go to prove poor Duncan the slayer of Silas Finn," the squire remarked, sadly.

"I would not believe you, Barney Bolls, on oath about the most trivial matter," the widow said, in a tone that made Barney flinch, and the constable smile.

"But," she continued, "I cannot do other than admit that the evidence against my son is very strong."

"It is circumstantial, I admit, and this letter to Jessie is the strongest clew against him."

"Still, gentlemen, I am sure Duncan is not a cowardly murderer."

"When did you see your son last, widow?" asked the constable.

"I dressed his wounds, inflicted by the man now dead, and who beat him most cruelly indeed, and then left him in his room to go to sleep."

"And you have not seen him since?"

"No."

"At what hour was this, widow?"

"Shortly after dark."

"When did you discover his absence?"

"He did not come down when breakfast was ready, and I sent up for him, and 'Liza returned with word that he was not there, that the room looked disturbed, and handing me a note she had found on the bureau."

"I opened the note, and here it is."

She gave it to the squire, who read aloud:

"MY DEAR MOTHER:—
"I cannot longer remain here to face my fellow students, who saw me so cruelly disgraced by old Silas Finn, whom you have told me you intended to marry."

"I cannot stand such a creature taking the place of my father, and so I go away."

"Where I go, it matters not, but I shall not forget your good teachings and I will not disgrace you."

"When we meet again, if we ever do, mother, may it be under far happier circumstances than our parting."

"I will let you hear from me now and then, that you may not mourn me as dead."

"Say good-by to all for me, and pray for your unhappy son."

DUNCAN DARE."

"My theory is, widow," said the constable, after listening to the letter, "that Master Duncan went to the school-house, to leave the letter for Miss Jessie, and was tempted, in brooding over his flogging, to go up and see the teacher, and thus it was he shot him."

"I do not believe him guilty, sir."

"Well, widow, it is my duty to capture him if I can, so tell me how he left the farm?"

"No horse was missing, sir."

"He took his clothes?"

"Only a small bundle."

"And is any boat missing?"

"None, sir, all the boats are in the inlet, for I sent Dan to see."

"This is strange, and leads me to suspect that he is in hiding here."

"You are at liberty to search, sir."

"It is my duty, widow, painful though it be."

"What say you, squire?"

"It would be better to make the search, though I do not believe Duncan is here."

"Nor do I, as he would be foolish to remain where he could be discovered, if he was guilty of the murder," said Mrs. Dare.

"He says he is going away, that is certain, but how has he gone?" the constable remarked in a puzzled way.

"Well, sir, you can search the house, the farm and the forest, but my word for it, you do not find my boy."

"He has disappeared just at the time the dominie is killed, and, after all that has occurred, it is natural to suspect him, but he is innocent, I feel."

"May I ask, widow Dare, if you were engaged to marry Dominie Finn?"

"Yes, Squire Hampton, I was, and it seemed to distress Duncan deeply; but I could not break my pledged word, and had Silas Finn lived, I should have become his wife; but, thank God! I am free," she said in a low voice, which only the squire's ears caught, for the constable and Barney Bolls were getting ready to search the premises.

The widow, with haggard, sorrowing face, led the way from room to room, from cellar to garret, and a thorough search was made.

It was found that Duncan had taken only a change of clothing and his money; all else he had left in his room.

At last the constable said:

"He is certainly not in the house, but now to search the out-houses and farm."

This was done, the widow still going with the three men, and a like result followed—the boy could nowhere be found.

Returning to her desolate home, the widow threw herself down upon the sofa in the parlor, and murmured:

"Thank God my boy has gotten safely away!"

"Thank God I do not have to be bound to Silas Finn!"

"But Heaven have mercy upon my poor child, bearing as he does in his wanderings the brand of murderer—and great God! he may indeed be the murderer!"

CHAPTER XV.

ON THE TRACK.

THERE was the wildest excitement in the little community, where so long had dwelt the murdered schoolmaster.

The funeral was attended by hundreds, from long miles around, and he was buried in the little graveyard surrounding his school-house home.

The virtues of the man, if he had any, were alone discussed; and, as is usual with departed ones, the vices were whitewashed over.

The scholars of the dead dominie knew him as he was, for children are excellent readers of human nature, and they shook their nice little heads when they heard Silas Finn called almost a saint.

They gave all their sympathy to the living boy, rather than the dead master.

That Duncan Dare was the murderer, hardly any one, even among the scholars, doubted.

His mother still doubted, against all seeming proofs of his guilt, and Squire Hampton had his doubts, along with the constable, perhaps; but all else looked upon Duncan as the murderer.

To add to the misfortune pretty Jessie Hampton lay at home dangerously ill of brain fever, and in her delirium she was constantly begging:

"Good Master Finn, don't beat poor Duncan any more!"

"See, master, you are making the blood show through his clothes!"

"Spare him, Dominie Finn, for he has done nothing wrong!"

It was pitiful to hear the poor child's pleading with one who was dead, for one who was living.

The constable had gotten his deputies together, and the whole island had been searched for the Boy Refugee, as he was called.

Word was sent up to New York and Brooklyn, of the murder, and a correct description of Duncan was given, and sent broadcast.

How he had escaped no one knew, and no one could surmise.

So mysterious was his departure, that many believed he was still in hiding on the island, and the coolness of the widow added to this opinion, for she seemed perfectly composed, though her face showed that she suffered deeply.

Thus the days passed by, and the mystery was not cleared up, either of the death or Duncan's escape.

Had a boat been missing it would have solved his mode of flight.

But along the whole coast not a boat was missing.

It was remembered what a fearful storm had come on that night, and had he put off in a boat, certain death would have followed.

It was recalled that a schooner, an armed vessel, had been seen off the coast at anchor, the evening before the fatal night, and Dan had told him he had been sent to tell the villagers of the danger the craft was in, and afterward had met his young master.

This showed that he had left the house certainly, and at that hour.

The storm had effaced all tracks on the road and on the beach, and this threw the searchers at fault.

Learning of the schooner, and that she was armed, and floated the United States flag at her peak, the constable visited the seaport towns from Philadelphia to Portland, to discover what vessel-of-war was cruising along the Long Island shores, and if he found the one, he felt confident he would discover Duncan Dare on board, for he said to Squire Hampton:

"Squire, my idea is that the boy went off to this schooner-of-war in a boat before the storm broke, and then escaped."

"But what boat, Kane?"

"That makes little difference, squire, for he was taken off by some one!"

"Ah!"

"And the boat was brought back."

"I see, Kane, and it looks plausible; but what carried him out?"

"I suspect some one, sir."

"The negro, Dan?"

"No, squire."

"Who, then?"

"His mother."

"Aha! she is a good boat-woman, I believe, sir."

"The best on the island, sir, for you remember she went out and saved her husband, Captain Dare, from a wreck."

"Well, that might be, for she is a daring woman, for all her gentleness and beauty, and your idea may be correct, while her self-possession certainly aids the belief that you are right."

"Now, squire, I shall go to the different seaports to find this schooner-of-war, and on board of her I'll find Master Duncan."

"I almost hope not."

"So do I, sir; but duty is business with me, squire, and I've got to do all I can to discover and capture the murderer of Silas Finn, even if it was my own brother that did it."

"I know it, constable: but if Duncan was taken, I fear my poor little Jessie would have a relapse that would cost her life."

"The fact is, she is improving rapidly now, and knowing that Duncan is accused of the murder she stoutly denies his guilt, yet is glad that he is away."

"I cannot make up my mind, sir, that he is really guilty, still it looks black against him."

"Now I must be off, squire, and I'll search the harbors from Philadelphia to Portland."

"In the mean time, if anything should turn up, write me to the directions I will give you."

Before departing Constable Kane went over to have a talk with the widow.

He found her calm, and still believing in her son's innocence, but he could get nothing from her to aid him in his search.

She stoutly denied that she had seen her son after bidding him good-night in his room, and said that she had not touched the oars of a boat for a month, or the tiller, either.

She had not seen the schooner at anchor among the shoals, though Duncan had spoken of its dangerous position, independent of the storm then springing up.

"If the schooner came in among the shoals without a pilot, widow, she did not go out without one in that blow," said the constable, and his keen eyes saw the woman start, as though some new idea had dawned upon her.

Finding he could get no further clew from the widow, Constable Kane went over to see Barney Bolls.

He found that worthy discussing the death of the dominie with a neighbor, who had been driving by and halted at his gate.

Barney Bolls had been a great deal shaken up by the death of his chum, for it had struck so near home to him.

What was more, he feared that Duncan had not yet fled from the island, and he did not know but that he might strike a revengeful blow at him, and he lived in terror of seeing him, while at night he doubly barred the doors of the old structure he made his home, and slept with one watch-dog in his room and another outside.

Mr. Bolls was without doubt on the anxious seat, and wished to protect himself from an untimely end.

After a long interview with Bolls, Constable Kane took his departure from the village leaving in the stage that ugly night for New York, for the time of which I write was long before the steam whistle of locomotive or steamboat had echoed along the shores of Long Island.

So quietly did he slip away that no one knew he was gone until he was missed, and then it was noised about that the constable had a clew and would return with the Boy Refugee, the young murderer of Dominie Finn.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DISCOVERY.

CONSTABLE KANE was as untiring in his hunt as a hound, for he went first to New York and made a thorough search of that port for a vessel answering the description of the schooner seen off the island, on the night of the storm and the murder.

He found no clew there, so departed by vessel for Philadelphia, and then extended his hunt to the port of Wilmington; but he could learn of no vessel-of-war, such as he looked for, being then on that part of the coast.

Next he visited Baltimore, and here it was suggested to him that at the Navy Department in Washington, he could obtain information regarding the movements of Government cruisers.

So to Washington he went, and found that a schooner-of-war was stationed in the neighborhood of Boston, while two revenue cutters, schooner rigged, were hovering in the vicinity of New York and on the Chesapeake, and might have extended their cruising ground to the Long Island shores.

The Chesapeake cutter was sought for, found, and the fact made known that she had not been out of the bay for months.

Then the New York harbor cutter was looked up, and her captain said that he had not cruised out of the Sound and New York bay for half a year.

"There was said to be a pirate craft, a schooner, in these waters some weeks ago, sir, and yet I heard of her committing no depredations, so I put her down as a foreign vessel-of-war," said the cutter's captain.

"A pirate craft?" said the constable to himself, adding:

"Now that would be the very craft that a murderer would wish to fly to."

"But I will look up the Boston schooner now."

And to Boston he went, to find that he was again at fault, for that schooner had not been near the Long Island coast.

From some fishermen who had seen the schooner anchored on the Shoals, Constable Kane had obtained a perfect description of her, rig, hull and armament, and he well knew the vessels he had boarded did not answer to the craft he wished to find.

He however returned to New York to take another look about there, as he did not wish to go back thwarted.

So back to New York he went, and visiting the shipping he asked all sailors he had a chance to talk with if they had seen such a schooner.

To his delight the skipper of a fishing-smack had seen just such a schooner as the constable described.

They had been coming into port, ten days before, with a cargo of fish, when a schooner, looking very much weather-beaten, and with topmasts housed, had come walking after them in splendid style and soon overhauled them.

The captain had purchased some fish of him, and had then stood away around Sandy Hook toward the Horseshoe.

It was just dark then, and the skipper did not notice what became of the schooner.

"Did you observe any one on her decks particularly, skipper?" asked the constable.

"Yes, there were two officers in uniform, a youth in sailor garb, and a lady."

"A youth did you say?" quickly asked the constable.

"Yes, a likely lad of fifteen, I should say."

"Describe him, please," eagerly asked Constable Kane.

"Well, I didn't notice him particularly, though I did see that the lady was very beautiful."

"He was a lad, as I saw him, with black hair and eyes, it seemed to me, well-formed for a youngster, and had the look of one who had pluck."

"I thank you, skipper; and you say the schooner rounded the Hook and ran into the Horseshoe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was weather-beaten, had her topmasts housed and patched sails?"

"Yes!"

"Had a broadside of three guns, and a pivot-gun mounted fore and aft?"

"That's what he had, sir."

"That is the craft I am looking for," said Constable Kane, and he felt that he was on the right track.

"The youth is none other than Duncan Dare, that is sure; but she cannot be a pirate, with a lady on board."

"It is some Government vessel coming in from a long cruise."

"A pirate, too, would not pay for the fish he took," and turning to the skipper, he said:

"You say he paid you for your fish?"

"He did, indeed, and I only wish my cargo could have been sold at the same rates, for he gave me two pieces of Spanish gold for a few messes."

"Spanish gold?"

"Yes, and that made me think he might be a buccaneer, only outlaws don't pay, they take."

With this information, Constable Kane started for Sandy Hook.

He took the ferry down to Staten Island and there made inquiries.

"I haven't seen no vessel, shipmate," said an old tar, "but there is a boat looks like a man-o'-war's boat lying down below here, while her crew have gone up to the tavern."

"There was five of them, a coxswain and four seamen."

Obtaining the locality of the boat, Constable Kane set out to find it.

It was just dark, and he went along the shore until he found the boat half drawn out upon the beach.

In a short while he saw five men approaching, and they were all carrying heavy loads on their shoulders.

They walked straight to the boat, ran her off into the water, and were putting their bundles into it when the constable came out from the shadow of a clump of trees and approached them.

He saw them start at sight of him, turn quickly and drop their hands to their belts, as though they were fearful at having been surprised in some act of outlawry, and he called out quickly:

"Ho, messmates, can you tell me what vessel-of-war is anchored in the lower bay?"

"Who are you?" bluntly said the coxswain, stepping toward the constable.

"I'm looking for a friend that is on a vessel-of-war, and as I don't know what craft he shipped on, I am searching the different ones in these waters, so I heard of an armed schooner being in the lower bay, and judged you came from her, as you look like Government tars."

"We are; but who said there was a vessel-of-war in the lower bay?"

"A skipper of a fishing-smack, which was overhauled by the war-vessel, and got some fish from him."

"When was this?"

"Some ten days ago."

"Did he describe the craft?"

"He did."

"What did he say of her?"

"A weather-beaten schooner, topmasts down, sails patched, and with eight guns."

The coxswain glanced at his shipmates anxiously, and they at him, but the constable saw their glances.

"Is it your craft?" he asked.

"Yes."

"A Government vessel?"

"Yes, a cruiser."

"Not a foreigner?"

"Oh no, an American."

"Has she been cruising along the Long Island shore of late?"

"Well, yes, some weeks ago."

"Was she there in a terrible storm some weeks ago?"

"You'd have thought so, if you had been on board."

"Now tell me, is there a young lad on board of your craft?"

"There are several of 'em."

"But one that came off to you from the Long Island coast?"

The constable saw the same glance pass between the crew, and the coxswain asked:

"A lad?"

"Yes."

"Who did what?"

"Come off to the schooner in a boat from the Long Island shore?"

"No boat came off to us when we anchored there."

"No?"

"Not any."

"Let me see; you lay there in the afternoon in a calm, did you not?"

"We did."

"You anchored, as the tide was running in?"

"Yes."

"You found your anchorage a dangerous one?"

"Mighty shallow."

"The storm broke some time before midnight?"

"Yes."

"You left in the storm?"

"Yes."

"Now, did not a boat come off to you from the shore?"

"No, sir."

"You are sure?"

"Perfectly."

"Well, I would like to find out about a lad who mysteriously disappeared that same night, and who I am sure boarded your vessel, for I cannot account for his disappearance any other way."

"What kind of a lad?"

"One by name, Duncan Dare—"

Again the look between the seamen.

"His age?"

"About fifteen, and he is a handsome, likely fellow."

"What do you want with him?"

"Well, he ran off and left his poor mother in great distress, thinking she was going to marry his schoolmaster; but she will not marry the master now, and I want the boy to go home with me."

"I see; well, as I said, there are several boys aboard our ship."

"The skipper of the fishing smack said as how he saw a youth on board your schooner, that answered to Master Duncan Dare."

"I tell you what you can do, sir."

"Well?"

"Our schooner lies below here, and we came up here to the village for stores, as you see; and you can return with us and see if the boy is on board."

"I thank you, I would be glad to do so."

Again the mysterious look passed between the men, and Constable Kane got into the boat, the men followed him and took up their oars and swiftly they sped away down toward the Narrows.

CHAPTER XVII.

A MOTHER'S PLUCK.

THE departure of Constable Kane seemed to worry Mrs. Dare, greatly.

She did not understand his mysterious leaving and seemed to dread that he had discovered some clew as to the whereabouts of her son.

Did he fetch Duncan back, she feared that he would receive but little mercy in a trial, for all seemed to have made up their minds, with one or two exceptions, that Duncan had deliberately murdered the schoolmaster in cold blood.

His threats that he should not marry his mother, his desire, naturally, for revenge, for the flogging given him, the scenes that had occurred in the school-room, all were put together, and were considered convincing proofs of the boy's guilt.

In fact, if Duncan Dare did not murder of Dominie, who had done so, was the poser people asked each other.

So they accepted the situation as it appeared to be, and settled, in their own minds, that Duncan Dare was old enough to hang, and must hang for his crime.

But first catch him, was the decision that they came to, and they awaited anxiously the return of Constable Kane.

All had a quiet admiration for the Constable's abilities in detective work, and of his courage, and the words that were oftenest heard, were:

"Just wait until Nat Kane gets back."

"He'll find him."

People seemed to feel that widow Dare knew where her son was, for she did not appear, in their minds, to suffer enough through his absence as a refugee from justice.

She was wont, after the departure of the constable, to ride over to the village every day, and arrive there just before the mail-coach came in.

Then she would wait to see if any letter came for her, and, with a disappointed look would mount her horse and ride slowly homeward.

Now the widow was greatly admired, and being possessed of a snug little property, and it having become known that she had intended to marry Silas Finn, the beau of the village were wont to regard these daily rides of hers with a look of favor, and they spruced up and regularly were on hand at the mail to get a bow or a word from her.

A very handsome woman she was too, as seen in her snug-fitting riding habit and fancy hat, and few persons would have believed her over twenty-six years of age.

Pale she certainly was, except when the exercise of riding flushed her face; but her eyes wore a strangely sad look, and there were lines around the corners of her mouth which were forming there from suffering.

One day the widow was a little late in arriving at the little post-office, and as she rode up, she saw a group of persons standing around Miser Bolls, as Barney Bolls was familiarly known.

The miser had something in his hand, which all seemed to be regarding, and he evidently was the first to catch sight of the approach of widow Dare, for his face changed color and he hastily entered the office of the tavern.

Up dashed the widow, and refusing aid offered, sprung to the ground, threw her rein over a hitching-post, and entered the little post-office at the end of the tavern piazza.

She bowed coldly in acknowledgment to various salutes, and, with one end of her skirt thrown over her left arm, and her riding-whip in her right hand, she asked:

"Any letters for me to-day, Mr. Jinkins?"

"Yes, widow Dare, there was one, and it is in the handwriting of your son, so said those who knows his writin'," answered the man in the office.

"What right, sir, have you to allow any one to examine a letter arriving for me?

"Give it to me instantly, sir, and do not let this happen again," and her voice rung with anger, while her eyes flashed.

"My dear widow Dare, I meant no harm; but Barney Bolls said as how he was going over to see you and would take it to you, and he said it was Duncan's writing, as did others."

"And that wretch has it?"

"What wretch, widow?"

"That miserly old wretch, Barney Bolls."

"Yes, widow."

"Where is he?"

"He has gone, widow."

"Mr. Jinkins, I wish you to distinctly understand that your office as postmaster is a sacred one, and you have no right to exhibit a letter; and I warn you, sir, not to give any missive coming for me to any one whosoever, for I will call for my letters; and if I hear it rumored when I get one, I shall see that you are reported to Government as unworthy of your place."

The widow's voice rung with anger, and Postmaster Jinkins trembled beneath her glance and words, while all who heard were awed and gave way with alacrity as she walked down the piazza.

"Where is Barney Bolls?" she asked, addressing her question to the crowd in general.

"He was here when you rode up, widow Dare, and went into the tap-room," said one.

Into the tap-room the brave woman stalked.

Barney Bolls was there, seated in a corner near the fire—for a fire was burning upon the earth, the day being chilly.

He had not expected the widow to come into the place where men were drinking, but he was mistaken, that was all, for Mary Dare was in deadly earnest.

Miser Bolls held a paper before him to hide himself, as he saw her, and his face changed color; but she walked straight toward him, and said:

"Miser Bolls, you offered to take a letter to me, and why have you not done so?"

"You told me not to again visit your house, widow, or you would set the dogs on me," whined Bolls, while the crowd looked on with increasing interest.

"Why did you then say you would bring me my letter, sir?"

"I meant to send it to you, widow."

"Give that letter to me at once, sir!"

"I—I—I think I shall keep it, widow, and give it to Constable Kane when he returns."

"What has Constable Kane to do with my letters, sir?" and Mary Dare spoke with strange calmness.

"The letter is from your boy, and—"

"Give it to me, sir!"

"No, widow, I shall keep it for the constable."

The eyes of the woman fairly blazed.

She knew that the letter must be from her loved boy, a refugee from his home, branded with the stain of murder.

If seen, his address would be known, he would be arrested, brought there and hanged, young as he was.

She was like a tigress at bay, and fairly hissed the words:

"Give me that letter, sir, or take the consequences!"

"I shall keep it, as it is my duty to do, for the law would make you give it up," boldly said Barney Bolls.

"Do you refuse?"

"I hate to, widow, but I feel that I am doing my duty," whined the miserly old wretch.

Quick as a flash the whip was in the air, and the lash descended upon the shoulders of Barney Bolls.

"Oh!" he cried, as the lash cut to hurt, and he threw up his hands to protect himself.

But hot and fast rained the blows, over his shoulders, head, face and hands, and the wretch howled with pain, and attempted to escape.

But she kept him in the corner, hurling him back with a strength no one would believe she could possess, and the whack, whack of the whip mingled with his yells of pain.

"Mercy! widow, have mercy!" he yelled.

"Give me that letter, sir!" was the stern response.

"Mercy! mercy! take her away! take her away!"

But not one moved to his aid, and still the blows fell fast and furious.

"You will kill me, widow!"

"Give me my letter, sir!"

"Oh God! I must do it to save my life," he shouted, and he thrust his hand into his breast pocket, drew out the letter and threw it from him, at the same time crying out:

"Some of you take it and run with it!"

Some did spring forward, and one young man got his hand upon it, but he yelled in agony as the widow's trim foot went down upon his fingers with a force that nearly crushed the bones.

Instantly she stooped and seized the letter, just as a deputy-constable entered the door.

Quick as a flash she sprung to the hearth, and into the flames she dashed the letter, while turning, she stood at bay as the constable rushed forward.

"Back, Constable Dunn, or I shall strike you!" and she shortened her whip, bringing the handle up for use instead of the lash.

The constable halted, and in that instant the letter was destroyed, and with a light laugh the brave woman walked out of the tap-room as soon as she saw that but ashes remained of the tell-tale missive from her son.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ARREST.

MOUNTING her horse, after her exciting scene in the tap-room of the tavern, widow Dare rode away at a rapid gallop.

Those who watched her saw that she did not take the road to her home, but went along the highway in the direction of the "Haunted School-house," as the little building was now called, where Silas Finn had lost his life.

Strange stories were already told of persons having seen the ghost of the schoolmaster walking among the graves, as had been his wont in life.

Along dashed the widow Dare, and arriving at the school-house, she drew her horse down to a halt and gazed toward the new-made grave of Silas Finn.

What thoughts surged through her head—who can tell?

But bitter they must have been, for her face was full of anguish.

Brushing away tears that came unbidden, she again rode on, wheeling into a road that led toward a hill upon which was situated a grand home in the midst of a park of giant trees.

It was the home of the Hamptons, and had been for several generations.

Known as Hampton Hall, it was declared to be the finest homestead on Long Island.

A thousand of acres surrounded it, the fields being well cultivated, the pastures rich with grass, and hundreds of well-fed horses, cattle and sheep were visible feeding in a valley, through which ran a small stream.

Hampton Hall was two stories and a half high, had innumerable piazzas here and there, several wings, and boasted of nearly thirty rooms; in fact it was larger than the village tavern.

The rooms were all comfortably furnished, though the squire, with only himself and daughter, for he was a widower, occupied but one wing.

But then there were half a dozen servants about the house, and Squire Hampton was wont to entertain well.

He devoted his time to teaching his little girl though he allowed her to go to the village school of Silas Finn: but woe would it have been to Silas had the squire known that he had raised his hand to Jessie.

The pretty young miss had not made known this fact, fearing she would be taken from school and thus see no more of Duncan Dare, for it was a case of deep girlish love on her part for the handsome boy.

Up to the door rode the widow, and the squire came down the broad steps and aided her to alight.

"I am delighted to see you, Mistress Dare," he said, "and this is an honor, your calling, and I fear me much it is only occasioned by something having gone wrong."

"But come in and see my little girl, for she is up and well again, though very sad."

He led the widow up to the piazza, and there they were met by Jessie.

She looked pinched with suffering, and white; but she smiled sweetly and put up her lips for a kiss.

"We will sit out here, as it is pleasant," the squire said, and a servant brought easy-chairs and placed them upon the piazza.

The view from Hampton Hall was a grand one indeed, showing meadow, hill and valley and plains, and beyond the rolling ocean.

The landscape was dotted with pleasant houses, and the village, a mile or more away, looked very peaceful and inviting from the piazza.

"I am glad to see you so much improved, Jessie, and have wanted to come over and call, yet feared to do so, as it might worry you," said widow Dare in her sweet way, and the squire could not but think how handsome she was.

"Thank you, Mistress Dare: but have you heard from Duncan?" and the tears came into Jessie's pretty eyes.

"It is on that account I have come, and, squire, I wish to consult you, for I took the law in my own hands to-day, though Heaven knows I could not but think how handsome she was."

"Indeed! What have you done, Mistress Dare?" anxiously and eagerly asked the squire.

"I horsewhipped that old scamp, Barney Bolls."

The squire suddenly broke forth into a hearty laugh, and Jessie joined in.

"But I am rude, Mistress Dare, only it seemed so ludicrous, and I know he deserved it; but tell me of it, please."

In a few words the widow told her story, and the squire again laughed, and then complimented her upon her pluck.

"But you burned the letter, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"That is most unfortunate, for I do not think Deputy Dunn meant to take it from you, or would have dared do so, and you have lost Duncan's address, as he doubtless gave you one, and, not hearing from you in reply, he may deem that you have cast him off."

"But we will hope for the best, and that he will write again; and, after all, it is best that the letter was destroyed, as somehow the boy's address might have become known, and I advise you to send to the distributing office in New York and order your letters held there for you, so that they do not come here, and you can manage to get them in some way every week or two."

"I will do so, squire; but yonder comes Deputy Dunn, and Barney Bolls is with him, for I recognize his old blind horse."

"You are right, and they are coming here,"

said the squire, as the two horsemen turned into the grand gateway leading to Hampton Hall.

"They have followed you here, Mistress Dare."

"For what reason, squire?" was the calm query.

"That fellow Bolls will arrest you for assault, and bring damages, without a doubt; but I will take your case, Mistress Dare, and win it!"

In a little while the deputy and Barney Bolls arrived, and the former dismounted, while the latter remained in the saddle.

"Oh, widow! you have given that fellow something to remember you; look at his face!" said the squire, with a chuckle of delight, as he saw that Barney Bolls's face and hands had been seamed by the keen lash of the widow's whip.

"Squire, I have a warrant here for the arrest of widow Mary Dare, for damage done Barney Bolls by assault, and I must take her to prison," said the deputy.

Mary Dare did not flinch, while Jessie said, quickly:

"Oh, what a shame! I hate that Barney Bolls."

"I do not love him, Miss Jessie, but I must do my duty, and I hope the widow won't feel hard toward me," said the deputy.

"Not in the least, sir," was the reply, and then she added:

"Deputy Dunn, I submit to arrest, sir, without remonstrance, and am ready to accompany you to prison."

"And I will go with you, Mistress Dare, for you shall not enter behind the prison walls, as I will give bail in any sum for your appearance to answer the charges of that miscreant," and the squire gave Barney Bolls a look of withering scorn.

CHAPTER XIX.

INSNARED.

It will be remembered that Constable Nat Kane entered the boat with the five seamen, and who said they were from a schooner-of-war that was undergoing repairs in the lower bay.

The constable was a fearless man, one who had confidence in himself and his ability to take care of himself in danger.

He clung to the idea that Duncan Dare was on board of the schooner, and that he would find him there.

He had his papers of arrest all made out, and meant to serve them on the youth at night.

So he got into the boat, suspecting no harm from men he deemed to be United States sailors.

Having passed through the narrows, the wind was found to be fair and fresh for a run across the bay, and so the mast and sail were set and the yawl skimmed along at a five-mile-an-hour pace.

"Where is your vessel at anchor?" asked the constable, as he saw that they were heading straight across the bay.

"Down under the Highlands of Navesink," was the answer of the coxswain.

Having no longer use for their oars, the five men lolled about at ease, the coxswain at the tiller, and no one seemed inclined to talk.

Constable Kane now and then asked a question, but he received short replies in return.

After running across the Horseshoe anchorage the yawl was headed up into the mouth of the Shrewsbury, and kept along under the shadows of the Highlands.

"Your vessel seems to be a long way off, coxswain," said the constable.

"Yes."

"I thought she was anchored in the Horseshoe."

"No."

"Is she far from here now?"

"Call it a mile or so."

"In the north Shrewsbury?"

"Yes."

"It is an out-of-the-way place to seek an anchorage."

"The captain's home is not far away."

"Ah, I see," and the constable kept quiet for some time.

At length the boat headed in toward the starboard shore, the sail and mast were taken in, and the oars were resumed, some of the men having to be awakened to resume their task of rowing.

In under the deep shadows of the overhanging banks, which were heavily wooded, and the boat glided into a small cove.

A light was visible aboard, and a voice rung out:

"Boat, ahoy!"

"Ahoy, the Spitfire!" answered the coxswain.

"Ay, ay, all right," the voice said from the vessel's deck.

"That was the voice of the youth I seek," said Constable Kane, eagerly.

"Indeed!" the coxswain remarked dryly.

"Yes, and I shall seize him and carry him back with me, for I have the papers for his arrest."

"Ho, the Spitfire!" suddenly called out the coxswain.

"Ahoy, the boat!" came the response.

"We have a stranger with us in the boat, who wants to come aboard, for he says he is a constable from Long Island in search of a runaway boy."

"Ay, ay, bring him aboard," came the response, and it was in the voice of the one whom Constable Kane said he had recognized.

A moment after the boat ran alongside, and the coxswain stepped on board, bidding the constable follow him.

As the latter did so, the coxswain turned quickly, at the same moment presenting a pistol to his breast, and said, sternly:

"You are my prisoner, sir!"

"What does this mean?" gasped the amazed constable.

"It means, sir, that you have come on board a pirate vessel, and you are a prisoner."

"A pirate craft?"

"Yes, sir."

"No, this cannot be, for surely there is some mistake," gasped the amazed constable.

"This craft, sir, is the pirate schooner Spitfire, from the West Indies, where she has lately made it so hot for herself that she has come north on a cruise to refit and add to her crew."

"We would be glad to enlist you as an able seaman, if so it please you; but if not, we will have to keep you in irons."

"But I am an officer of the law, and I came here to capture a fugitive whom I now feel assured is upon this vessel."

"You are mistaken, sir; but when I saw that you knew of our being in the lower bay, I felt that it was dangerous knowledge, so I determined to bring you on board and keep you until we are ready for sailing."

"Our captain is away, as also our first luff, and when they come they may make short work of you."

"But I will speak to our second luff, and see what he says."

"Here, lads, clap this fellow in irons."

The men obeyed, the constable offering no resistance, as he saw the utter uselessness of his doing so.

The coxswain then walked aft and entered the cabin.

There sat a lady engaged in reading, and standing near the companionway, evidently awaiting his coming, was none other than Duncan Dare.

The boy had browned up since leaving home, and he had more of a manly air, learned even in that short time, while his face had grown sterner and colder in expression, strangely so for one of his years.

He wore a blouse uniform and tarpaulin, the latter encircled by a gold cord, and upon his shoulders was the rank of a junior lieutenant.

About his waist was a belt, in which were a pair of pistols, and a short sword was suspended by a chain.

"Lieutenant Dare, we are back, sir, and I gave you notice that we had picked up a stranger, and what he came for," said the coxswain.

"Yes; I am thankful to you."

"Describe the man, please," and the coxswain did so.

"It is Constable Nat Kane," said Dare.

"Such he said his name was, sir, and though he does not know who we are, some two years ago he captured four of our men, who went ashore on the Sound side of the island, and had them hanged."

"I remember to have heard of it; they belonged to a schooner that had been pirating in the sound," said Duncan.

"Yes, sir, and the captain swore to have the man's life some day in revenge, for his friend, one whom he loved as a brother, was among the men the constable hanged."

"I was of the party too, but escaped, and the captain swore he would some day be revenged upon the constable, and he will."

"He don't recognize me, for I wore a beard then; but I knew him the moment I saw him, and you need have no fear, sir, of him, for Captain Carl will hang him sure, as soon as he and Lieutenant Lennox return from the city."

"Where is the prisoner now, coxswain?"

"In irons, sir, and in the hold."

"Send him here to me."

"Do you wish to have him see you?"

"He will not know me, for I shall mask my face."

"Ay, ay, sir," and the coxswain retired.

Soon he returned, accompanied by Constable Nat Kane.

The officer looked slightly crestfallen, for he was heavily ironed, but he glanced hastily around the cabin as he entered.

Duncan Dare sat at the table, a black mask shielding his face from view, and the coat and hat of Captain Carl on.

The lady referred to sat on the other side of the table, and she was reading.

It was the same beautiful woman that had come to the rescue of Duncan Dare the night of the storm, and the constable could not help a start of admiration at her beauty.

He looked fixedly at the masked face before him, but did not recognize the youth in his attire of the captain of the pirate schooner, and the mask, which so wholly concealed his face.

"Coxswain, you can retire, and I will be responsible for the prisoner," said Duncan, assuming a deep tone which the mask aided in disguising.

"Ay, ay, sir," and the coxswain disappeared.

"My man, do you remember killing several pirates two years ago, by hanging?"

Brave as he was Nat Kane started at the question.

"Yes, they landed in a small boat, to pillage a farm-house, and I had been watching the movements of their vessel, so captured them, and they were hanged."

"True, and for that act, it is decided that you shall never be allowed to go free, but shall be hanged as they were."

"I did my duty then, and I am doing it now, so I must accept what comes, good or bad."

"It will be bad in your case, sir."

"So be it, I will die doing my duty," was the bold remark.

"Well, sir, I am determined that you shall not die."

"Who are you?"

"Only a second luff."

"Why do you wish to spare me?"

"I hate to see a brave man hanged like a dog."

"It is good of you, but what will your captain say?"

"I do not care, for I am in charge here now, and shall do as I please and take the consequences."

"You are plucky."

"Thank you; but what caused you to come on board this vessel?"

"To arrest a boy whom I believe took refuge on this schooner when she was off the Long Island coast."

"Is he here?"

"I have reason to believe so."

"What is his name?"

"Duncan Dare."

"Well, my man, you will have to look elsewhere for him, and to do so, I now relieve you of your irons, and you can depart by slipping over the stern of the schooner into the water."

"You swim, do you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then that is your only chance, for it is not a hundred feet to the shore, and you can readily reach it, but if you remain here, you will be hanged before dawn."

"I thank you, sir, and I will take advantage of your kindness, for I see I have been caught in a tight box."

"Your life will be the forfeit if you remain here."

"Now, off come your irons, and drop silently over the stern, as soon as you go on deck."

"You are free, sir," and Duncan Dare unlocked the irons, and the constable hastily turned and walked up the companionway to the deck.

All was quiet there, and no one was aft.

He looked over, and saw that he could readily drop over the taffrail into the sea, and he turned and said:

"Duncan Dare, you have saved my life, and I appreciate it."

"Take my advice and never do you return to your home—good-by!"

Saying, he slipped quietly over the stern into the sea, and when Duncan Dare came on deck, which he did quickly when seeing that he was recognized, he saw nothing of the man whose life he had saved.

After waiting until he felt the constable had had time to reach the shore, Duncan Dare shouted out:

"Ho, lads! aft here, all of you, for the prisoner has escaped!"

The crew came in a rush, and Duncan said hastily:

"He came up the companionway and sprung into the sea."

"He cannot swim, sir, with his irons on," cried the coxswain.

"All right, he will have to drown, then; but into the boats, men, and see if you can pick him up!"

The order was quickly obeyed, and two boats rowed about the schooner, and to the shore in search of the constable; but it was fruitless, as the reader can well surmise.

"Now, lads, we must get out of this and go to the rendezvous Captain Carl appointed, in case we had to leave, for that man may bring a force upon us, if he has escaped."

"Up with the anchor, men, and let the schooner get out of this," came the order, and like a specter craft the schooner glided out from the dark, heavily wooded shores and held on her way down toward open water, Duncan Dare at her helm, for he had resumed his mask, and near him stood the beautiful woman, so thoroughly out of place on a pirate deck.

CHAPTER XX.

THE RETURN OF NAT KANE.

WITH the squire as security, the widow Dare was readily prevented from being taken to the county lock-up, and the revengeful feeling which prompted the act of Barney Bolls, in having her arrested was not gratified.

He had danced around in agony and anger for a while, after his severe handling at the end of the widow's keen whip, and then the thought flashed through his mind to have her arrested, so off he had rushed to the village magistrate, the deputy had been called on, and the arrest had been made.

Back to her home, stern-faced as a man, rode the widow.

She was beginning to feel the anguish that can come to one on earth, whose life should be all that happiness could make it.

She rode slowly along, and 'Liza, who met her at the door, saw that something had happened.

"Oh, mistis!" she cried in alarm.

"Liza, I received a letter from my poor boy, but that wretch Barney Bolls took it, pretending he would bring it to me, but intending to find out where Duncan is by reading it; but I forced him to give it to me, with the lash of my riding-whip, and fearing the deputy would take it from me, I threw it into the fire."

"Oh mistis! but you readied it?"

"No, I know nothing of its contents."

"Poor chile."

"But that is not all, 'Liza, for the miscreant, Barney Bolls, had me arrested, hoping to get me in the lock-up; but Squire Hampton went my bail, and here I am, but I have suffered greatly in mind, 'Liza, and it is hard to have to bear all that I do, when I feel I have done nothing to deserve it."

"But they shall not break down my proud spirit, 'Liza, for I will face all that comes, as I know my boy is not guilty of that murder, and believe he will yet return."

"Poor child," again said 'Liza.

"Come in and get some hot tea and supper: then you feels better," and the kind-hearted negress aided her mistress to change her riding-habit for a wrapper, and soon set before her a tempting repast.

Night had come on, and the widow sat alone in her room, lost in deep and painful reverie when a loud rap at the front door knocker startled her.

'Liza at once went to the door and admitted Constable Kane, who asked to see Mistress Dare.

"Is he alone, 'Liza?" asked the widow, her voice hoarse with emotion.

"Yes'm."

Into the parlor went the widow, and the constable greeted her in a kindly way, after which he stepped forward and closed the door.

"Ah, sir, tell me if you know aught of my poor boy, the refugee from home, the branded murderer?" cried the widow anxiously, the kind manner of the constable momentarily breaking down her reserve.

"Widow Dare, I have come to tell you that which I intend to repeat only to the magistrate, for there is no need that others should know."

Mrs. Dare sat in silence, but her manner was that of one who was nerved to bear any evil.

"I am thankful to you, sir, if you mean to serve me," she said.

"I do mean to serve you, widow, and I feel sorry for you."

"The fact is I have been off on a hunt after Master Duncan, as duty compelled me to do,

and I started my search by trying to find the schooner-of-war that lay off here the night of the storm—hark how the wind howls; it is blowing up another storm and I must hasten home, for I have had a hard run of it of late."

As the constable spoke the wind moaned outside around the corners of the house, and the distant rumble of thunder was heard.

"Yes, a storm is coming up; it threatened it this afternoon; but tell me of my boy, Constable Kane."

"Well, I went up and down the coast to a dozen different ports, and even to Washington, to find out what vessels of that description they had stationed here, and at last got a clew that led me to the craft."

The widow started.

"I discovered a boat that had just come from a war-vessel, and I was convinced, after some talk with the coxswain, that Master Duncan was on that craft, so I got into the boat to go back with it."

"Then my boy is a prisoner, and—"

"He is nothing of the kind, widow, for he is as free as I am."

"Thank God!"

"I boarded the craft, when I found that it was indeed a schooner-of-war, but not an honest one."

"Constable!"

"Fact, widow Dare, for she was hiding there, and being refitted for sea, while her captain and three officers were doubtless on a lark up in the city, for you must know this was in New York waters."

"Yes, yes; but pray tell me all."

"There was a lady on board—"

"A lady?"

"Yes, Mistress Dare, and she was very beautiful to be so wicked."

"Was she a wicked woman, Constable Kane?"

"She was on board that craft, widow."

"And what was the craft?"

"A schooner, ma'm, trim as a racehorse, and—"

"Oh, pray tell me the nature of the vessel."

"I'm coming to that, widow; you see I heard a voice on the schooner hailing us that I recognized, and I was arrested and put in irons as soon as I got on board."

"Was my son there?" asked Mrs. Dare, in a husky voice.

"I'm telling you all, ma'm; but you remember some years ago I caught some pirates landing here in a boat?"

"Yes, yes."

"Well, I got 'em hanged, as you may recall, and there were four of 'em, but one got away."

"That one was on the schooner, and he told me very plain that the captain's best friend was among those who got strung up, and that I would be done away with the same way."

"The officer on board sent for me, and I was taken back to the cabin."

"There he sat, and he was rigged out in a uniform and wore a mask."

"A mask?"

"Yes'm, he wore a mask, and he had to disguise his voice, but I recognized him."

"It could not have been my son," groaned the woman.

"It was your son, widow, and he seemed to be boss on that schooner while the other officers were away."

"I saw on his finger the ring the congregation clubbed in and gave him for saving the life of Parson Brown's child that time, when it would have been drowned but for Master Duncan."

"It is a peculiar ring, as you know, widow, and I recognized it."

"Well, I saw Master Duncan meant to save me, for he knew they'd hang me when the captain got back; so he took off my irons and told me to slip overboard and swim ashore, for it was only a few rods off."

"And I did so, widow, and I got away, owing my life to Master Duncan."

"So I just gave up my run after him and came home—and here I am; but I'll keep the secret from all but the magistrate, though I came to tell you your boy was not dead, as some said you feared he was."

"Better that he were dead—yes, a thousand times, dead, than what you say he is!"

"Just so, widow."

"But are you sure the vessel is a pirate?"

"Certain."

"Can there be no doubt?"

"They wouldn't have intended to hang me, if it was a square craft, widow."

"True—too true; but I thank you, Constable Kane—I thank you from my heart for your

goodness in wishing to keep my boy's career from the world, though piracy is hardly worse than the crime with which he is now branded.

"But you are good to me, Constable Kane, and I appreciate it."

The constable then took his departure; but hardly had he gone, when widow Dare said, quickly:

"'Liza, I cannot sleep until I have told a secret now upon my mind."

"Get my riding-habit, and tell Dan to bring my horse to the door."

"Lordy, mis', there coming up a terrible storm!"

"What care I for a storm, for that in my heart is far worse?"

"Do as I tell you, 'Liza."

The negress saw that the widow was in deadly earnest, and she quickly obeyed.

Taking from a drawer a pistol, widow Dare placed it in the pocket of her riding-habit, and soon after rode away in the darkness, in spite of the threatening storm, while she muttered:

"It will be just such a night as that on which the fatal deed was done!"

CHAPTER XXI.

A BEAUTIFUL ASSASSIN.

IT grew to be a wild night after the widow Dare had started upon her strange ride; but she held on her way without looking to the right or the left, and apparently unmindful of the storm that was sweeping up from seaward.

Straight to the house of Squire Hampton she went, and to him she told the strange story made known to her by Constable Kane."

The squire listened in amazement; and there was one other who heard all, though it was thought she was asleep.

That one was Jessie Hampton, and it cut her to the heart to hear what Constable Kane had said.

Her boy lover a pirate?

Out upon the thought, for he could not be wicked, as people said pirates always were.

The squire did not know what to think.

He could not doubt the constable, and yet, had it not been for the ring the boy wore, he would have doubted him, for Squire Hampton was strong in his belief in the innocence of Duncan Dare.

Refusing to remain longer at Hampton Hall after her mission had been completed, the widow Dare mounted her horse and dashed away in the gloom.

Belated villagers, on their way home from the tavern, beheld a horsewoman dashing along through the storm at the full speed of her horse.

A flash of lightning revealed her distinctly, and there was no disguising the fact that it was the widow Dare.

The rain poured in torrents, the winds swept along with relentless fury, while the lightning was fearfully vivid and the crash of the thunder appalling.

And on through the relentless storm sped the widow Dare.

At last she arrived at her home, threw herself from her horse and fainted.

The tax upon even her strong nature had been too great, and she had yielded to unconsciousness.

Tenderly had 'Liza and Dan taken her to her room, and while the latter went to look after the horse, the negress brought her mistress to, out of her swoon, and undressing her, got her to bed.

"Oh, 'Liza! this has been a fearful night!

"Just such a night as the one on which Silas Finn was murdered," she groaned, and, turning her face to the wall, the woman closed her eyes and tried to sleep while the storm still raged on.

In the mean time a man had entered the village tavern, and told what he had seen, and that he had recognized the widow Dare dashing through the streets like one mad.

In the tap-room sat Constable Kane.

He had simply told those who gathered about him, that he had been unable to capture the boy, and the clews he had found amounted to nothing, as far as the catching of Duncan Dare was concerned.

More than this he did not say, and many thought that he was deeply cut at his failure.

He started, when he heard that the widow had gone through the village at the full run of her horse, and in such a night.

Where had she been?

What could it mean?

He had heard all about the horsewhipping she had given Barney Bolls, and secretly he rejoiced at it, though he deeply regretted that she had been arrested.

At last he arose to go home; to his little thirty-acre farm beyond the village.

"There is considerable mystery in all this," he muttered, as he drew his coat about him, pulled his hat down over his face and went out.

Briskly he walked along, and his way lay by the dilapidated house of Barney Bolls.

"What! old Barney up at this time, wasting oil," he said, as he saw a light in the miser's wing of the old house.

As he drew nearer he saw that the door was wide open and, the rain was driving in.

He stopped in amazement, and then ventured forward.

In through the rickety gateway he went, and stepped quickly into the house.

It was the room the miser kept as a sitting and dining-room combined.

The door leading into the bedroom beyond was also open, and there was no light there.

"Barney Bolls, where are you?" called out the constable.

No answer came.

There seemed to be a strange feeling in the air, and, seizing the lamp, the constable entered the bedroom.

To his stern lips came a cry, for there, seated in his chair all dressed, was Barney Bolls, but a bullet-wound was in the center of his forehead.

"The man is dead! Great God! what does this mean?"

He darted out into the hallway to call up the old servants of the miser.

They were not there, and then the constable remembered having seen them in the outgoing stage going to see their son in a distant village, as was their wont twice a year.

Closing the door the constable ventured back to the village, the magistrate was aroused and told the strange story, and then with that dignitary and a deputy, Constable Kane returned to the home of the miser.

He still rested in his easy-chair, and a look of alarm was upon his whip-scarred face.

There was no indication of robbery, for nothing seemed to be disturbed.

Some one hinted that it might be revenge.

Then the name of widow Dare was somehow mentioned, and the magistrate made known how he had been told by a drunken villager, that he had met the widow Dare in the forest near the school-house, the night of the Silas Finn murder.

The drunken fellow had not spoken of it again, and so the judge had not pushed the matter.

Now a second murder had been committed, the widow had been seen riding through the town, and it was on just such a stormy night as when the master was killed.

The three men, the judge and the constables, looked at each other and shook their heads.

Duncan Dare had had reason to be revengeful toward the dominie, as the widow had to feel revenge against the miser.

It looked very black for widow Dare, and so the judge and the constable mounted their horses and rode away to Dare farm, leaving the deputy in charge of the miser's body and home.

The widow Dare had tried in vain to sleep, so she had arisen, dressed herself, and in answer to the knock went to the door.

It was the constable and the judge.

"Widow, I am back again."

"Yes, constable; come in, you and the judge," and she led the way to the sitting-room.

"It is after midnight, Mistress Dare, and you have not gone to bed," said the judge.

"No, I cannot sleep; but why have you come?" she said fretfully.

"May I ask if you have a pistol, Mistress Dare?"

"Yes, one that belonged to my husband."

"I just was about to load it when I heard your knock."

"It was not loaded, then?"

"No; for I fired it off to-night at a fox that crossed my path."

"To-night? Then you have been abroad to-night?"

"I may as well confess it, constable; I rode over to Hampton Hall to tell the Squire what you had told me regarding my poor boy."

"Did you go elsewhere?"

"No."

"Widow Dare, do you not feel revengeful toward Barney Bolls?"

"Heaven knows that I cannot help it," she moaned.

"May I ask, Mistress Dare, if you were not out on the night of the storm some weeks ago, the night that Silas Finn was murdered?"

They saw her start, but she answered:

"I was."

"Where did you go?"

"To the school-house."

They started then, and she continued.

"Silas Finn had cruelly beaten my poor boy, and I was engaged to him, but I went to sever that engagement, and bid him do his worst."

"I found him sitting at his table dead: but I kept the secret, as I feared I would be accused of his murder."

"Widow Dare, Barney Bolls is also dead."

"Dead! Do you speak the truth, sir?"

"I do, for he was found to-night, seated in his chair, a bullet in his brain."

"Oh God!" and the beautiful head was drooped in anguish.

"Widow Dare, as a magistrate, it is my duty to have you arrested upon the fearful charge of being the murderer of both Silas Finn and Barney Bolls."

"Who would have believed that one so beautiful could be so cold-blooded an assassin," and the magistrate was deeply moved.

But Mary Dare did not even quiver at his words; pallid as death she said simply:

"I am ready to go with you to jail, constable, for it seems my fate to suffer all human kind can bear and yet live on."

The storm blew itself out, the sun arose in a clear sky, and its rays, penetrating the iron grating of the jail window, fell upon Mary Dare in a cell, accused of being doubly a murderer.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE YOUNG SAILOR'S FORTUNE.

WEEKS passed away since the arrest of the lovely widow Dare, and she still lay in her prison cell awaiting trial.

One morning the constable got a letter that seemed to stagger him.

He wiped his eyes over and over again, as he read it, and he looked both amazed and pleased.

At length he went up to see the magistrate, and they had a long talk together.

"Then the two went to Hampton Hall and conversed with the squire.

"Read the letter again aloud," said the magistrate, and the constable obeyed.

It was as follows:

"NEW YORK, Oct. 20, 18—.

"MY DEAR CONSTABLE KANE:—

"I am sorry I did not have a chance for a talk alone with you, the night you came on board the pirate schooner, to carry me back as a runaway; but it is now turning out all right, as you shall see."

"I could not stay in the country, after my flogging from Silas Finn, so I swam out to the schooner that night, when she lay at anchor on the shoals."

"She proved to be the West Indian pirate, Spitfire, and they wished me to pilot them into the inlet; but this I refused, and yet took them to sea."

"Seeing how well I handled a vessel, the pirate captain made me second luff, and I was forced to take it, honest boy though I was."

"Besides, I wished to aid a lady on board to escape."

"It seems she had a lover, a young naval officer, who went to the bad; one day he came to her home on the Chesapeake Bay and kidnapped her, and she found out he was a pirate."

"She would not marry him, and he held her prisoner, hoping to force her to do so."

"She told me her story, and that her father was a planter on Chesapeake Bay, so I remained on board to help her get away, and also to capture the pirate."

"I got away with her at last, for we sailed for Baltimore after leaving New York, where you came on board, and I carried the lady home."

"The captain of a brig-of-war took me up to Washington, and the President made me a middy, and told me to capture the schooner, for I told him I could do so."

"I knew just what the plans of the captain were, and so I plotted accordingly."

"He had papers, received from some old pirate, telling of a treasure buried on Long Island, and that an old buccaneer lieutenant lived there, as a schoolmaster, trying himself to find the buried treasure."

"That old schoolmaster was Silas Finn."

"Before I swam out to the schooner, the pirate captain had landed with some men, and had gone to the school-house and shot Silas Finn, for he found in him an old foe; but they did not find the treasure, and hurried back to the schooner, as the storm was coming on, and then it was I went on board."

"Now, the pirates have set a time to land again and look up the treasure, and they think they know where it is, and I want you to help me capture them."

"They have set two weeks from to-night, and I shall take a coaster and forty American sailors and follow the schooner down to her anchorage."

"After they land I shall capture the schooner, and I wish you, with a party of villagers, to surround the landing party and take them."

"There will be some twenty of them all well armed."

"Now, get your men together, but tell no one what is up, and I'll let you hear from me again."

"I will send my love to no one, as I do not wish them to know of me until I come back with flying colors."

"Your friend,

DUNCAN DARE.

"P. S.—I am spying on the pirate, and I just learned that a landing was made by three of them,

some time ago, and that they shot old miser Bolls, whom they say had found the treasure, but would not reveal its hiding-place to them.

"Be sure and be ready for them when they come."

"But I'll write or send word again."

The judge, the squire, and the constable looked at each other, and then the former said:

"Squire, offer bail for the widow, and then you go over and escort her home."

"I'll do it," said the squire, and soon after the widow Dare was being driven home; but the news he had the honest man could not keep, and he told her all.

Then the brave woman broke down, and when she reached her home she was very ill.

For days she hovered between life and death, and then the danger was passed, and once more she was herself again; but kind-hearted people said she had better died, than live to meet the punishment she must suffer for the crimes she had committed.

But many there were who felt no pity for the beautiful assassin, as they called her, and were angry that she had been allowed to leave the jail.

"It's the squire's work, and if she is not hanged he'll marry her," was the cruel way they put it.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONCLUSION.

TRUE to his word, Duncan Dare again wrote to the constable, and so, when the night rolled around, when the pirates were to land upon their secret expedition after the treasure, all was in readiness to receive them.

Constable Kane had picked his men, two-score of them, armed and drilled them secretly by night, and yet not one of them knew the duty they were to perform.

About nine o'clock, a schooner ran into the Dare farm inlet, and dropped anchor, and soon after two boats loaded with men, put off for the shore.

Landing, and under the guidance of one who seemed to know the way, the party started through the forest and stopped at the deserted house of miser Barney Bolls, which was now shunned by all.

The men carried spades and picks, and entering the house, began to take up the floor of the room in which the miser had lived.

But suddenly a voice cried:

"Down on your faces all of you, or die!"

The voice came from the walls, it seemed.

Some obeyed, others started to run, shots followed, men fell dead, and soon the band of pirates were prisoners, for Constable Kane had well-planned his attack.

"Where is your captain?" cried the constable.

No one knew, and it was at once known that the pirate chief had escaped.

Then shots and cries were heard down by the sea, and Constable Kane, leaving a party as a guard over the prisoners and dead, hastened with others to the rescue.

The firing ceased ere he got there, and upon his arrival upon the shore of the inlet, he saw two vessels lying side by side.

One was an armed schooner, the other a merchant craft.

"Ho, the schooner!" he hailed.

"Ay, ay! is that you, Constable Kane?"

"Ay, my lad, and we have bagged all of our game but the chief."

"And I have captured the schooner; but the pirate chief must not escape."

"Come ashore, lad, and let the people know who you are!" cried the constable.

Springing into a boat, the boy was rowed ashore, and as he sprung out upon the beach, the bright moonlight revealed in midshipman's uniform, Duncan Dare.

"Men, this is Midshipman Duncan Dare, of the United States navy—and not a murderer and outlaw, as we all once believed him to be."

"But, Duncan, my lad, I'll look after the craft and prisoners for you, while you hasten up to the house to see your mother, for she has suffered most deeply."

The boy bounded away, but met his mother, the squire and Jessie, coming down to the inlet beach, and the meeting that followed, no pen can describe.

That all was well, when the mystery was solved the next day, the reader can well imagine, and Duncan Dare won fame and fortune in the years that followed, that made those who had been his accusers, glad to know him, and atone by their good deeds for their cruel suspicions of the past, upon the mother and her noble son, whose pride and grief had made him a Boy Refugee.

THE END.

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- 446 Haphazard Harry; or, The Scapgegrace of the Sea.
- 450 Wizard Will; or, The Boy Ferret of New York.
- 454 Wizard Will's Street Scouts.
- 462 The Born Guide; or, The Sailor Boy Wanderer.
- 468 Neptune Ned, the Boy Coaster.
- 474 Flora; or, Wizard Will's Vagabond Pard.
- 483 Ferrets Afloat; or, Wizard Will's Last Case.
- 487 Nevada Ned, the Revolver Ranger.
- 495 Arizona Joe, the Boy Pard of Texas Jack.
- 497 Buck Taylor, King of the Cowboys.
- 503 The Royal Middy; or, The Shark and the Sea Cat.
- 507 The Hunted Midshipman.
- 511 The Outlawed Middy.
- 520 Buckskin Bill, the Comanche Shadow.
- 525 Brothers in Buckskin.
- 530 The Buckskin Bowers.
- 535 The Buckskin Rovers.
- 540 Captain Ku-Klux, the Marauder of the Rio.
- 545 Lieutenant Leo, the Son of Lafitte.
- 550 Lafitte's Legacy; or, The Avenging Son.
- 555 The Creole Corsair.
- 560 Pawnee Bill, the Prairie Shadower.
- 565 Kent Kingdom, the Card King.
- 570 Camille, the Card Queen.
- 575 The Surgeon-Scout Detective.
- 580 The Outcast Cadet; or, The False Detective.
- 586 The Buckskin Avenger.
- 591 Delmonte, the Young Sea Rover.
- 597 The Young Texan Detective.
- 602 The Vagabond of the Mines.
- 607 The Rover Detective; or, Keno Kit's Champions.
- 617 Ralph, the Dead-Shot Scout; or, The Rio Raiders.
- 644 The Hercules Highwayman.
- 650 Butterfly Billy, the Pony Rider Detective; or, Buffalo Bill's Boy Pard.
- 656 Butterfly Billy's Man Hunt.
- 662 Butterfly Billy's Bonanza.
- 668 The Buccaneer Midshipman.
- 674 The Wizard Sailor; or, Red Ralph, the Rover.
- 679 The Sea Shadower; or, The Freebooter's Legacy.
- 686 Orlando, the Ocean Free Flag; or, The Tarnished Name.
- 692 The Rival Sharps; or, Redfern, the Secret Service Scout.
- 697 The Scarlet Sombrero; or, The Sharp from Texas.

BY BUFFALO BILL (HEN. WM. F. CODY).

- 8 Kansas King; or, The Red Right Hand.
- 19 The Phantom Spy; or, The Pilot of the Prairie.
- 55 Deadly-Eye, the Unknown Scout.
- 68 Border Robin Hood; or, The Prairie Rover.
- 158 Fancy Frank of Colorado; or, The Trapper's Trust.

BY CHARLES MORRIS.

- 118 Will Somers, the Boy Detective.
- 122 Phil Hardy, the Boss Boy.
- 126 Picayune Pete; or, Nicodemus, the Dog Detective.
- 130 Detective Dick; or, The Hero in Rags.
- 142 Handsome Harry, the Bootblack Detective.
- 147 Will Wildfire, the Thoroughbred.
- 152 Black Bass, Will Wildfire's Racer.
- 157 Mike Merry, the Harbor Police Boy.
- 162 Will Wildfire in the Woods.
- 165 Billy Baggage, the Railroad Boy.
- 170 A Trump Card; or, Will Wildfire Wins and Loses.
- 174 Bob Rockett; or, Mysteries of New York.
- 179 Bob Rockett, the Bank Runner.
- 183 The Hidden Hand; or, Will Wildfire's Revenge.
- 187 Fred Halyard, the Life Boat Boy; or, The Smugglers.
- 189 Bob Rockett; or, Driven to the Wall.
- 196 Shadowed; or, Bob Rockett's Fight for Life.
- 206 Dark Paul, the Tiger King.
- 212 Dashing Dave, the Dandy Detective.
- 220 Tom Tanner; or, The Black Sheep of the Flock.
- 225 Sam Charcoal, the Premium Darky.
- 235 Shadow Sun, the Messenger Boy.
- 242 The Two "Bloods"; or, Shenandoah Bill and His Gang.
- 252 Dick Dashaway; or, A Dakota Boy in Chicago.
- 262 The Young Sharps; or, Rollicking Mike's Hot Trail.
- 274 Jolly Jim, the Detective Apprentice.
- 289 Jolly Jim's Job; or, The Young Detective.
- 298 The Water-Hound; or, The Young Thoroughbred.
- 305 Dashaway, of Dakota; or, A Western Lad in Quaker City.
- 324 Ralph Ready, the Hotel Boy Detective.
- 341 Tony Thorne, the Vagabond Detective.
- 353 The Reporter-Detective; or, Fred Flyer's Blizzard.
- 367 Wide-Awake Joe; or, A Boy of the Times.
- 379 Larry, the Leveler; or, The Bloods of the Boulevard.
- 403 Firefly Jack, the River-Rat Detective.
- 423 The Lost Finger; or, The Entrapped Cashier.
- 428 Fred Flyer, the Reporter Detective.
- 432 Invincible Logan, the Pinkerton Ferret.
- 456 Billy Brilek, the Jolly Vagabond.
- 466 Wide-Awake Jerry, Detective; or, Entombed Alive.
- 479 Detective Dodge; or, The Mystery of Frank Hearty.
- 481 Wild Dick Racket.
- 501 Roots, the Boy Fireman; or, Too Sharp for the Sharper.
- 566 The Secret Service Boy Detective.
- 598 Jimmy the Kid; or, A Lamb Among Wolves.
- 627 Tom Bruce of Arkansas; or, The Wolf in the Fold.
- 655 Plucky Paul, the Boy Speculator.
- 667 Bob and Sam, the Daisy Detectives.

BY J. C. COWDRICK.

- 860 Silver-Mask, the Man of Mystery.
- 869 Shasta, the Gold King; or, For Seven Years Dead.
- 420 The Detective's Apprentice; or, A Boy Without a Name.
- 424 Clbuta John; or, Red-Hot Times at Ante Bar.
- 439 Sandy Sam, the Street Scout.
- 467 Disco Dan, the Daisy Dude.
- 490 Broadway Billy, the Bootblack Bravo.
- 506 Redlight Ralph, the Prince of the Road.
- 514 Broadway Billy's Boodle.
- 524 The Engineer Detective.
- 536 Broadway Billy's "Difficult."
- 548 Mart, the Night Express Detective.
- 557 Broadway Billy's Peath Racket.
- 571 Air-Line Luke the Young Engineer.
- 579 The Chimney Spy; or, Broadway Billy's Surprise-Party.
- 592 The Boy Pinkerton.
- 605 William O' Broadway; or, The Boy Detective's Big Inning.
- 615 Fighting Harry the Chief of Chained Cyclone.
- 628 Broadway Billy's Dead Act.
- 640 Bareback Beth, the Centaur of the Circle.
- 647 Typewriter Tilly, the Merchant's Ward.
- 659 Moonlight Morgan, the "Pizenest" Man of Ante Bar.
- 669 Broadway Billy Abroad.
- 675 Broadway Billy's Best; or, Beating San Francisco's Finest.
- 687 Broadway Billy in Clover.
- 696 Broadway Billy in Texas.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH.

- 23 Nick o' the Night; or, The Boy Spy of '76.
- 37 The Hidden Lodge; or, The Little Hunter.
- 47 Nightingale Nat; or, The Forest Captains.
- 64 Dandy Jack; or, The Outlaws of the Oregon Trail.
- 82 Kit Harefoot the Wood-Hawk.
- 94 Midnight Jack; or, The Boy Trapper.
- 106 Old Frosty, the Guide; or, The White Queen.
- 123 Kiowa Charley the White Mustanger.
- 139 Judge Lynch, Jr.; or, The Boy Vigilante.
- 155 Gold Trigger, the Sport; or, The Girl Avenger.
- 169 Tornado Tom; or, Injun Jack From Red Core.
- 188 Ned Temple, the Border Boy.
- 198 Arkansaw; or, The Queen of Fate's Revenge.
- 207 Navajo Nick, the Boy Gold Hunter.
- 215 Captain Bullet; or, Little Towknott's Crusade.
- 231 Plucky Phil; or, Ross the Red Jezebel.
- 241 Bill Bravo; or, The Roughs of the Rockies.
- 255 Captain Apollo, the King-Pin of Bowie.
- 267 The Buckskin Detective.
- 279 Old Winch; or, The Buckskin Desperadoes.
- 294 Dynamite Dan; or, The Bowie Blade of Cochetopa.
- 302 The Mountain Detective; or, The Trigger Bar Bully.
- 316 Old Eclipse, Trump Card of Arizona.
- 326 The Ten Pards; or, The Terror of Take-Notice.
- 336 Big Benson; or, The Queen of the La-so.
- 345 Pitless Matt; or, Red Thunderbolt's Secret.
- 356 Cool Sam and Par; or, The Terrible Six.
- 366 Velvet Foot, the Indian Detective.
- 386 Captain Cutlass; or, The Buccaneer's Girl Foe.
- 396 Rough Rob; or, The Twin Champions of Blue Blazes.
- 411 The Silken Lasso; or, The Rose of Ranch Robin.
- 418 Felix Fox, the Boy Spotter.
- 425 Texas Trump, the Border Rattler.
- 436 Phil Flash, the New York Fox.
- 445 The City Vampires; or, Red Rolfe's Pigeon.
- 461 One Against Fifty; or, The Last Man of Keno Bar.
- 470 The Boy Shadow; or, Felix Fox's Hunt.
- 477 The Excisor Sport; or, The Washington Spotter.
- 502 Single Sight, the One-Eyed Sport.
- 512 Branded Ben, the Night Ferret.
- 512 Dodger Dick, the Wharf-Spy Detective.
- 521 Dodger Dick's Best Dodge.
- 528 Fox and Falcon, the Bowery Shadows.
- 538 Dodger Dick, the Dog Ferret.
- 543 Dodger Dick's Double; or, The Rival Boy Detectives.
- 553 Dodger Dick's Desperate Case.
- 563 Dodger Dick, the Boy Videoc.
- 573 The Two Shadows.
- 582 Dodger Dick's Drop.
- 594 Little Lon, the Street-Singer Detective.
- 610 Old Skinner, the Gold Shark; or, Tony Sharp on Guard.
- 626 The Champion Pards.
- 637 Dick Doan, the Dock Boy Detective.
- 645 Kit, the Pavement Sharp.
- 653 Billy Bantam, the Boy Benga.
- 671 Jersey Jed, the Boy Hustler; or, Shadowing the Shadower.
- 685 Happy Hugh, the Boy Musician Detective.

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- 698 Old Crazy, the Man Without a Head; or, Lighter Luke's Clean Sweep. By Joseph E. Badger, Jr.
- 699 Simple Sim, the Broncho Buster; or, Playing the Fool for Big Stakes. By Lieut. A. K. Sims.
- 700 Deadwood Dick, Jr., Drop; or, The Sojourn at Satan's Spring. By Edward L. Wheeler.
- 701 Photograph Fred, the Camera Sharp; or, The Fight to the Finish. By T. C. Harbaugh.
- 702 Blue Jacket Bill; or, The Red Hat Rangers Red Hot Racket. By Col. Prentiss Ingraham.
- 703 Broadway Billy's Brand; or, The New York Delegates in Hard-up Camp. By J. C. Cowdrick.
- 704 Deadwood Dick, Jr., at Jack-Pot; or, Making Crooked Things Straight. By Edward L. Wheeler.
- 705 Violet Vane's Vow; or, The Crafty Detective's Craft. By Wm. G. Patten.
- 706 Tom Thistle, the Road-House Detective; or, The Harlem Sport's Star-Faced Pacer. By Jo Pierce.
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- 715 Wide Awake Len, the Quaker City Ferret; or, Caging the Cormorants. By T. C. Harbaugh.
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